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1. Fiction, English

# THE WINDING ROAD

BY

~~ELIZABETH GODFREY~~ pseud. of

AUTHOR OF "POOR HUMAN NATURE," "THE HARP OF LIFE," ETC.

J. Bedford

"For he was lord o' the windy wood
And prince o' the winding road."
—JOSEPHINE DODGE DASKAM

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1902

J.E.

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TO THE MEMORY

OF A FELLOW-TRAVELLER

IN THE COUNTRY THAT LIES EAST OF THE SUN AND WEST OF THE MOON

Since we deserved the name of friends,
  And thine effect so lives in me,
  A part of mine may live in thee
And move thee on to noble ends.

—TENNYSON. (*In Memoriam*)

## *BOOK I.*

### THE FIDDLER.

The Gauger walked with willing foot,
And ay the Gauger played the flute;
And what should Master Gauger play
But "Over the Hills and far away"?

—*R. L. Stevenson.*

A keeper of silence eloquent,
Needy, yet royally well-content.

Of the mettled breed, not abhorring strife,
And full of the mellow juices of life.

A lover of books, but a reader of man,
No cynic and no charlatan.

Who never defers and never demands,
But, smiling, takes the world in his hands.

—*Bliss Carman.*

Tympan and harp, awake!
For though the world drift from us like a sigh,
Music is master of all under the moon.

—*W. B. Yeats.*

# THE WINDING ROAD.

## I.

A TALL woman was walking slowly up the long pasture which slanted over the shoulder of the down. Beyond the curving slope Longford Head reared itself against the sky with its crest of ragged, wind-bent pines, marking the site of the Old Beacon and dominating five counties. She seemed moving solitary in a wide solitude, for the farmhouse from which she came was already hidden between the overlapping folds of the uplands. Our forefathers, when they must needs build on these wind-swept hills, built for shelter, not for outlook, and chose rather the spots where the lambs crouched in the winter storms. High as Priestlands lay, it nestled its long, steep roofs under the overhanging ridge of down, and was further fenced round by a belt of trees, the tops of which the wind had shorn to a dense, interlacing mass, where every twig yielded to the prevailing impulse and bowed itself the same way as its neighbour. Beneath them an orchard clung to the hillside, its gnarled grey boughs all striving northward, as did the arms of the stunted elms that bordered the short grass-grown cart-track that led from the high-road to the farmyard gate.

Above the lip of the down, except the pine-crest, not a tree, not a bush, not so much as a whin nor a juniper, nothing but the bents which the winter snows had bleached, all combed one way in the wind, and washed with the luminous, pearly shimmer that belongs to the high downs, and to February beyond all the months.

From the height, they said, you could on a clear day win a glimpse over five counties and the sea, but from even the garret windows little was visible but the swelling outline of the sheep-dotted hills, rising here and there to a coronet of pines or dimpled with scraps of low-growing coppices in the hollows, and over all the arch of the wide-brooding sky.

Up here it was very still with the hush that follows the sunset; you could almost hear the sheep cropping the grass on the hillside, half a mile away. Overhead the sky was a lambent green, melting into daffodil which deepened to red near the horizon, and in the midst of the flush floated a little clear, cold new moon. The February air was chill and dank, but Phenice was hardy and did not heed it, though she was clad in a cotton blouse and had rolled her sleeves up to the elbow. This was her resting time; all day her tasks followed each other with hardly an interval, but now the cows were milked, and "the lass," as her grandfather called the servant maid, had carried the heavy pails into the dairy to empty into the broad pans, and meanwhile she could take a few minutes' breathing space.

At such times she liked to climb up and look over the edge of her world—into five counties perhaps; but

Phenice's eyes travelled further than that. This evening indeed most people would have said there was nothing to see, for the early February dusk lay over the valley and began to creep up to the knees of the hills, but she always fancied she could see farther through the mists than when every detail was mapped out in noonday clearness. She could just make out where the river, like a ravelled threefold plait, wandered through the dim grey fields, and the course of the valley was marked by long ranks of sentinel poplars. Where the hills dipped there was a glimpse of the town, the spires and towers of its fourteen churches piercing the bluish smoky haze, and the ugliness of its red-brick suburbs and slated roofs gently blotted out. The long, heavy bulk of the cathedral stood out unimpeded by the mass of trivial detail in the surrounding houses, which the pitiless daylight would have emphasised. Beyond, on the other side of the valley, a white road, like a narrow ribbon, wound away across the hills right into the sunset. When Phenice was a child she used to wonder what lay beyond the golden gates, and now, though she knew quite well to what market towns the road went, yet still at sunset she wondered; "making believe," as the children say.

Silent was it, yet not wholly soundless, for as the wind swept up over the bare downs it was caught in the topmost branches of the pine trees, and murmured to them tales of the distant sea from whence it came. It always put her in mind of the great spotted shell on the parlour mantelpiece which her grandmother used to reach down for her, for a treat,

when she was a little girl and had done her task of sewing, and which, now that she was a woman grown and could reach it for herself, she still loved to hold at her ear that she might listen to the weird, wordless tale.

Presently a dark figure cut the shining sky, and a broad-shouldered man in brown gaiters and a velveteen coat came slowly across the further field to the gate over which she was leaning.

"Well, Phenie?"

"Well?"

That was all. They never had much to say to each other, these two. Perhaps because they had grown up side by side, and knew so well each what was in the other's mind that it seemed unnecessary to put it into words. And words were not very ready with either. Phenice put up her hand presently and picked a little bit of wool off the lapel of his coat.

"Been up over the Head? But you haven't got your gun."

"No, no time for that. Had to see to the sheep. We've got the big flock folded over the other side of the Devil's Punchbowl; there's a bit of shelter there." Then, after a long pause, "Shouldn't wonder if I have to go up again to-night to see to 'em."

"Why, Dan; why should you turn out when you've got two shepherds?"

"Old Zack is getting past his work, and young Zack is a fool."

Silence again. So still were they that a couple of hares came out from the copse in the hollow and

began to feed on the slope below them; presently, one snatching a dainty morsel from under the nose of the other, they engaged in a boxing match, quite oblivious of the proximity of human kind. Phenice watched them till, with a sudden whisk and frisk, they vanished. It was a few seconds before her ear caught the sounds which the wild creatures had heard from afar. At first it seemed only the wind in the bents, but gradually a tune detached itself—a gay, wild melody, with a curious lilt in it as though the player were walking. The colour deepened in her cheek and a light came into her eyes; she straightened herself and drew a little breath of expectation. As the light came into her face a shadow crossed her companion's.

"There's that chap again," he said.

"Again! Why, he hasn't been here for a long, long while."

She began to walk down the field, pulling down her sleeves as she went. The man vaulted over the gate and caught her up.

"Phenie, don't ask him to stop the night."

"As to that, grandad will do as he pleases. If he chooses to ask him, I'm not going to be inhospitable. He doesn't get about much now, and he likes a tune, poor old man."

"The fellow must be daft, to come out here fiddling. Why can't he stop in the town with his like?"

"He has no 'like,'" said Phenice shortly.

That was true enough, as anyone would have said at one glance at the strange figure who was strolling, fiddling still, along the road as they descended from the down. Mendicant? tramp? gipsy-musician? gen-

tleman-rover? What was he? that unique, fantastic figure, taking off his shapeless felt hat with a courtly grace as Phenice drew near? Was he old? Was he young? The slender figure might have been a boy's, but the brown, hatchety face and the inscrutable eyes looked as if they had seen many a strange sight and basked under many an alien sun. Perhaps they had, or perhaps he had only been to the country that lies East of the Sun and West of the Moon.

"A cold evening," said Andrew Everard curtly, and walked on under the stunted elms, hitting vindictively at the dead nettles that grew by the wayside. It was customary at this hour to fasten the outer gate, but he could not well shut it in the very face of the wayfarer; he left that for Phenice to do—or not. She lingered, with her hand upon it.

"You are not going to pass us by, Mr. Jasper?"

He had resumed his tune and walk. "It seems so," he said.

"Are you waiting for a formal invitation from Dan? You know it is just his way; he is always a gruff one: 'tisn't that he grudges you your welcome. You've grown wonderfully proud, I'm thinking."

"Not I. You know I accept just as easily as I give when I have it. Hospitality isn't mine to give, with never a roof over my own head, but what I have I'm free with."

"You give far more than you take, if one measures by pleasure. Isn't that"—she touched his fiddle—"worth far more than a supper and a bed? Do you suppose you are ever even paid?"

"Well, well! By the way, what do you think? A

fellow I met the other day at Buda-Pesth told me he was sure I could earn fifty pounds a night if——"

"Oh, Mr. Jasper! if? If what?"

"Oh, my dear, it was far too big an 'if.' If I would sacrifice life and freedom and this fair world to roam about in, and grind, grind, grind till all the heart was ground out of my playing—and then, if I could take ten years off my life and begin at the beginning again. And what is fifty pounds a night?—or a hundred for that matter? What, after all, is money?"

"It is a good deal," said Phenice simply. "Why, that would be three hundred pounds a week, and what would that come to in a month, and in the year? My goodness! I can't reckon it up in my head."

"Don't vex your brains doing sums; I shall never have it to add up. And if I had, money always runs through my fingers like water through a sieve."

"Well, I don't expect there's much to run through 'em this way of living," said Phenice. "There isn't much to be made out here on the hills."

"Enough to pay for a bed at the New Inn to-night. Don't you worry about me, Phenie." And he chinked some loose coppers in his pocket cheerfully.

"At any rate, you shall come in and get a good rest by the fire. You're footsore, aint you?"

"Not that; I'm never that, thank God! but my knees are a bit stiff. I can't think what's come to them—a chill, I suppose. I'm hideously thirsty, too. Give me a drink of milk before I go on my way, won't you?"

"Surely, and a bed too, if you'll have it. You know there's always room for you."

He had stopped playing meanwhile and walked by her side.

"You've been long away, Mr. Jasper," she resumed. "I began to think we were never going to see you again."

"Ay, a long time and a long way. So you remembered the tramping fiddler and thought upon him?"

"Many a time," said Phenice. "I don't think I ever pass that knoll where I found you first, when you were playing such strange, wild tunes I took you for a ghost, without saying to myself, 'I wonder where Mr. Jasper may be to-day. Perhaps he may be coming back; who knows?'"

While they talked they had reached the garden gate. The wide, low front of the house loomed before them like a shadow; it had grown so dark that only the outline of the long-roofed barns and ramshackle outbuildings showed in a heavy mass against the sky, but from the wide, three-lighted window on the left of the entrance a ruddy, dancing light played on the bricked path which led up to the door between the flower-beds, bare yet of all but a few tufts of snowdrops and crocuses.

"Go you in the front way," said Phenice. "I'll bring you some milk to the kitchen, if you'll sit down by the fire."

"No, no! I'll come round to the dairy door with you; I'm not coming inside."

A broad band of light falling suddenly on the bricks showed the front door to be open, and a hearty voice called out:

"Is that you, Mr. Jasper? Come your ways in and give us a tune."

"There's grandad," said Phenice. "I knew he'd want to see you. You won't say no to him."

She gave him a gentle push towards the hospitable door, while she turned off and went round to the back premises.

## II.

Farmer George Everard belonged to the fast-disappearing class of yeomen farmers. He and his fathers before him had held the farm at Priestlands in far-back days beyond the recording of deeds and leases, and he still lived much as they had done, in simple, homely fashion; using the big kitchen or house-place for daily living, and never attempting to rival in any way the modern style of the gentleman-farmers round about, who took up land, failed to make it pay, and disappeared, one after another. Even for him who had worked with his own hands, prosperity was not what it used to be in the "good old times." The reserve fund in the bank was diminishing and, even putting the good years with the bad, the tide was undoubtedly running out. But in the house there was still an amplitude of everyday comfort that was the easier from the entire absence of effort to keep up appearances. Phenice still followed the household ways in which her grandmother had brought her up. The standard at Priestlands belonged to a bygone day, but it was easy to live up to.

To people of homely notions that kitchen was a luxurious living-room. Inside the wide chimney, where the hams and sides of bacon hung far up in the shadows, were two wooden benches, worn smooth and shiny with much use, and between roared the logs in

a kind of iron cradle. Not much cooking was actually done there; the modern cooking stove had its abode out in the back kitchen, through the half-open door of which a red-brick floor and a range of shining pots and pans could be descried. Round about the chimney corner stood a high-backed oaken settle with an angle, fending off all draughts, and opposite the straw bee-hive chair with chintz cushions, in which grandad always sat of an evening. The corner cupboard with glass doors, the eight-day clock, the huge deep chest that stood in a dim corner, the Sheraton chairs, the lofty oak dresser, black with age, where bits of precious china and delft stood cheek by jowl with jugs and plates of modern crockery, had an air of belonging to the room, of being in fact the natural setting of the life lived there, that such things never acquire bought up and carried away to adorn the modern "Queen Anne" villa. They are homely, part and parcel of the home; you would never think of dating or pricing them. The low, deep window-seat was cushioned with patchwork, and there were little short curtains of a washed-out, rosebud-patterned chintz.

The wayfarer settled himself with a sigh of relief in the inglenook, pulling off his boots with the air of a man at home, and stretching out his chilled limbs to the blaze.

"I'm thinking you'd be the better for something stronger than milk, Mr. Jasper," said Phenice, entering and pouring the frothy whiteness into a tumbler from a deep-red jug. "Shan't I put a drop of rum with it?"

He shook his head and, seizing the glass, drank greedily.

"Ah!" he said, throwing back his head as he set it down, "that's good! It is the first thing I have relished to-day. All day I kept thinking if I could get to you, you would do me good."

She set down her little tray and came and stood close to him.

"What is the matter?" she said softly; "what ails you?"

"Nothing much now." He clasped his arms at the back of his head and nestled himself into the bend of the chimney, watching Phenice as she moved quietly about the room, spreading a white cloth on the table and laying rough horn-handled knives and forks in their places. Amongst these homely things she went about with a grace born of harmony; there was an inner correspondence between her nature and all things simple and unpretending. Away in the town, where she had had her schooling, spite of all her love for books, she had been lost, astray; here she was in her own place. The dark-blue woollen gown, the check blouse of paler shade that outlined her well-developed figure, the knot of smooth brown hair in the nape of her neck, the little escaping tendrils about her brow, had no fashion; they simply expressed the womanly, serviceable nature as the feathers of a little brown bird express bird-kind.

The two men were very quiet while she went about her preparations. Old Everard spoke once:

"You aint feeling well, Mr. Jasper; not quite in tune for the fiddle, eh?"

Jasper did not answer, and Phenice put in, "Let him rest, grandad," as she looked back from the pantry door. Then they relapsed into silence.

Presently Andrew came in, but he took no notice of the dozing figure in the chimney-corner, and a couple of minutes later "the lass" brought in a smoking dish from the back kitchen.

"It is all ready now," said Phenice, pulling down her sleeves and fastening her neat white cuffs at the wrist. "Will you come to the table?"

"I don't want anything; let me stop where I am," said the traveller with the fractious tone of a wayward child, and they let him be. Only presently Phenice took a plate, on which she put some dainty morsels, and set it beside him without a word. He opened his eyes and smiled at her, but shut them again and let it stand untouched upon the bench.

Andrew rose from the table after a brief and hasty meal, and put on a great-coat and comforter. At this time of year the flock needed constant oversight.

"Don't bar the door, Phenice; I'll be late, as like as not." And he went out.

Phenice went upstairs, and her light footfall might be heard with the heavy stump of the maid-servant as they moved about, preparing the room overhead for the unexpected guest. There had been no word of his going farther, so she made his room ready without a question.

The old man got out his books and his silver-mounted spectacles and sat him down to the brass-handled bureau, to tot up his week's accounts. He had grown infirm of late years and could do but little

outdoor work, but still he walked or rode about his fields on fine days, keeping the general oversight in his own hands; drove to the market on Saturdays and did his own bargaining, and his accounts were still kept in his old-fashioned, illiterate hand. He did not worry Jasper with any attempts to entertain him; his primitive idea of hospitality was to let folks do as they were minded. In his monotonous life he would have liked well enough a tune or a tale from the outside world to while away a dull evening, but he would not exact it as a price for his welcome. Clearly his guest was sick or weary, and must be humoured.

So there was no sound but the slow, laborious scratching of his pen, till Phenice came back.

"Your bed is ready, Mr. Jasper. You would like to rest, wouldn't you?"

He stretched himself. "It is extraordinary how stiff I am. I suppose it is going to sleep by the fire. Ah!"

He sank down again with a sharp cry, his face contorted with pain, and would have slipped from the narrow bench down against the glowing logs, if Phenice had not caught him in her strong arms.

"What is it? What is it?" she cried, as she got one knee upon the bench to steady herself, and held him resting against her.

"What is it?" he repeated, when the spasm would let him speak. "Scorching fire, cold steel through all my joints directly I attempt to move. What shall I do? Help me, Phenie!"

The man who had never known ache or ail in all his wandering life was like a child, bewildered in the

clutch of strange fever and anguish, and like a mother Phenice held him to her breast and soothed him.

The old man left his desk and drew near. "It 'll be the rheumatics, I'm thinking," he said. "He'll have slept out of doors once too often. Best get him to his bed."

Excellent advice, no doubt, but none too easy to follow—like most good advice. Jasper was tall, and though spare, a helpless man is heavy, and old Everard was too infirm to be of much use.

"We'll have to bide till Andrew comes in," he said.

"We may wait long enough, then," said Phenice. "He said he didn't know how long he might be kept. I'll manage. You take the candle, grandad, and go on in front. Now, Mr. Jasper, you get your arm over my shoulder. Don't be afraid to lean hard; I'm strong enough. Here, Polly"—as the dairy-maid appeared, peeping inquisitively at the back-kitchen door—"here, you come on his other side."

But when Jasper shrank and cried out at her rough touch, Polly drew back with many an "Oh, Lor'!" and "Oh, I couldn't!"

"All right, then," said Phenice; "you get out of the way. Now, Mr. Jasper, one big try, and never mind the pain for a moment. I must hurt you, but once I get you on your feet, you'll be able to get along."

She was right; the wrench to the stiffened muscles once over, he managed to crawl across the kitchen and climb the steep stair, though with many a groan, and leaning all his weight on the firm young shoulder that supported him.

As Phenice at length laid her burden on the bed, the wonder crossed her mind when he would be able to rise from it again. However, the future lay on the knees of the gods; the present was all she had to do with.

She wiped from his forehead tenderly the sweat which the agony of moving had brought out in big drops, and raised his head on her arm while she pushed the pillows up under it.

"Grandad will help you get your clothes off, and I'll bring you something hot presently."

Later she was bending over the glowing logs, stirring something in a saucepan, when she heard the scroop of the door and the sound of a heavy foot, knocking the mud off against the step.

"What, Andrew! back already?" she said, without turning her head.

"Ay, but I'm going out again. I've brought something home for you to nurse."

He drew near, and from under the cape of his coat a little fretful bleating made itself heard. She raised her flushed face for an instant.

"I've got something upstairs to nurse. Put it down on my old shawl in the chimney-corner a minute. I'll see to it."

"What! isn't that chap gone yet?"

"No, nor not like to go yet a while. He's gone to bed, ill."

Andrew turned something that began with a "d" into a whistle, and at that moment grandad slowly descended the stairs.

"Phenice, I wish you'd come to Mr. Jasper a

minute. I think he must be a bit light-headed. He has made me draw back the curtain and set the window wide open."

"Oh!" she said, pouring the contents of her saucepan into a cup as she spoke, "if that's all—he's always crazy about the fresh air. I'll go up."

"Well, I didn't venture to thwart him. Give me my candle, Phenice. You don't want me any more, I suppose?"

The current of cold air that met her as she opened the bedroom door made her shiver, but Jasper was lying with the bed-clothes tossed back from his shoulders as though it were a summer breeze. She went to the window without a word. There was a crisp feeling of frost in the air, and the stars glinted through the bare branches of the apple-trees like diamond points.

"Phenice, what are you doing?"

She turned, with the latch in her hand.

"I can't have you catch your death."

"Let it alone!" He raised himself on his elbow. "I tell you, Phenie, if you touch that window I shall drag myself downstairs and out again. I'd sooner die out of doors, and have done with it, than slowly smother in here. Why couldn't you let me sleep in the out-house on the straw, as you did that first night that ever I came?"

"Mr. Jasper! And you sickening for something! Do be good."

"Come here."

He took her hand and laid it on his hot forehead.

"Feel," he said; "and the night air won't cool it.

How do you suppose I could bear it if I let you shut me in here with never a breath?"

"Well," she said, with a sudden inspiration, "if I let it stop, will you take this to humour me?"

She brought the cup to the bedside and fed him spoonful by spoonful, he swallowing obediently since he was not asked to exert himself. Then she went to the huge old press that stood at the end of the passage, and extracted a great quilt stuffed with chicken-down. When she came back with it in her arms her patient had lain down and his eyes were closed. The drowsy potion she had mixed for him was beginning to take effect.

"It is so light he'll never notice it," she said to herself, as she covered him safely with it.

Andrew was still by the kitchen fire when she got down again, awkwardly trying to get some milk into the lamb's mouth with a spoon.

"Oh, so you've come back," he said crossly.

She seated herself on the step of the hearth and made a wide lap.

"Here, give it to me. I wonder if you thought to warm the milk. Poor mite, it can't drink! It doesn't know how. Look on the top shelf of the corner cupboard, and you'll find the old feeding bottle I had for them last year. There, there"—when presently he had brought what she wanted—"that's more like, isn't it? See, Andrew, it is sucking beautiful."

"Well, I must get back and see what is to do with the others. I only hope we mayn't lose any more of the ewes."

But he still lingered, kneeling in front of her;

watching how the lamb stretched its clumsy limbs and nestled itself into her lap; and the dog, an old English sheep-dog, white and gray, with a blunt nose and soft eyes, who had followed him in, came up and pushed his head over her shoulder to see what was going on.

"You'll have to go for the doctor in the morning, I'm thinking," she said presently, looking up from the little woolly patient in her lap; her thoughts having travelled away to the other.

Andrew stood up with a hasty movement.

"Do you mean to say," he said, "that that tramping fellow is in for an illness? Do you mean to have him laid up here upon your hands?"

"That's as may be. How can I tell? You wouldn't have me turn a sick man from the door, Dan?"

His only answer was a growl, as he and the dog went out together.

Between her two patients Phenice had a busy time next day. She was occupied with her lamb when the doctor came into the kitchen, having made his examination of the sick wayfarer upstairs.

"Well, Miss Osborne, I suppose I had better order a closed fly to take our friend to the Infirmary. You must mind and wrap him in every blanket you have got in the house—I'll see you get them all back safe."

"I suppose you think he'll be better seen to there than I could do for him?"

The doctor looked down at the little woolly nursling she was cuddling in her arms; at the tender eyes that were bent upon it.

"Well, no, I can't say that. He'll have to take his

chance among a crowd of others; there's a deal of sickness just now; but I don't suppose you would be prepared to saddle yourself with a six- or eight-weeks' case of rheumatic fever. It may well run to that, and I warn you he'll be awfully troublesome."

"But I suppose there would be a risk in moving him, wouldn't there?" Phenice spoke as quietly as if her whole soul were not hungering for an excuse to keep her burden.

"Well, yes, to be sure there is, to some extent. But what would Mr. Everard say to it? Hadn't you better consult him or your cousin?"

"They are both out," said Phenice shortly, "and I know grandfather would say, 'Let him stop.' He is a good-hearted man. There's plenty of room here, and I am the only person it will give any trouble to."

"Then there is no more to be said. I'll look in again to-morrow." He was pulling on his driving gloves as he gave her a few brief directions, and moved to the door.

Phenice delayed him a minute to lay before him the difficulty of the open window. Fortunately the doctor was a wise as well as a clever man.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that," he said. "Follow nature's guidance, as far as you can."

"Does that mean he is to do as he pleases? Sick people often have fancies for the things that do them harm; what then?"

"Ah, but he has lived so close to nature that he is something of an animal. An animal always knows what is good for it when it is sick. It is we over-civilised beings that have unwholesome fancies. Well,

I think I may leave him to your wisdom and his own. Good-bye."

And Phenice wondered whether it had been the instinct of what was good for him that had brought Jasper to her arms in his hour of need.

## III.

"I SMELL white violets."

The voice was very low and faint, yet not too faint to reach the ears of the watchful woman sitting hard by. The speaker was stretched full-length upon a bank in the shelter of a hawthorn hedge, which was thickening and swelling in every twig with yet unburst buds. The March sun lay warm upon the bank, but under the sick man a plaid was spread, and another rolled into a bolster beneath his head. He had protested, for he loved the smell of the moist earth when the roots began to quicken and the sap to stir, and liked to listen, so he declared, to the grass-blades growing; but after rheumatic fever what would you? He was too weak to resist his nurse, who for five weeks had exercised paramount authority over him. But, as she looked at him, she wondered sometimes how much longer she should be able to keep her linnet in its cage.

"I smell white violets."

"Nonsense!" she said, smiling and hardly raising her eyes from her seam. "Why, it is barely March yet. Mothering Sunday won't be for another two weeks, and we never look to find any sooner than that."

"Do you think I don't know the smell of a white violet? You house-dwellers lose your sense of smell

altogether. Why, who was it told me she never knew that snowdrops smelt till this year, eh?"

"It was only that I had not noticed; I can smell them now well enough; they have what I call a green smell. The smell of snow coming, too, I never used to heed, nor the smell of the earth when it thaws. How many things you have made me see, too, as well as smell, that I never saw before! The red sap rising in the woods over yonder like a flush—I don't think I ever used to see any difference till the leaves came out."

He began to draw himself feebly up from his couch. "Well, I am going to pick those violets for you, you little unbeliever."

"No, indeed, you are not. Lie down again; I'll get them—if they are to be got," she added *sotto voce*, for there was a decided vein of obstinacy in Phenice. Still, believing or not, to pleasure her wayward invalid she sought carefully and methodically along the bank under every little umbrella-shaped group of leaves. "Sick people always have fancies, sick men especially," she said to herself, "so I suppose they must be humoured; and Mr. Jasper, he's always a terrible one for fancies, sick or well. Ah——"

Yes, sure enough, there they were, not many yards from where he lay—four or five little white almond-shaped buds and one unfolded blossom; nestling their heads under their wings like sleepy white birds.

She brought them to him, and put them against his face without a word. He drew a long breath of sweetness, then, turning his lips a little, kissed the fingers that held them. It brought a little colour to her

cheek, but she took no notice. Mr. Jasper was not as other men.

"Put them in my coat for me."

She broke a little thread from her needlework and tied the tiny frail stalks together so that she could tuck them into his buttonhole; then for a minute she remained kneeling beside him, looking down at the face whose outward lineaments she knew so well, but whose story was a sealed book to her. What lay behind that calm, unfurrowed brow; those eyes like clear amber, yet inscrutable in their depths; that thin-lipped, close-shut mouth? Why did he lead such a strange, wandering life? She never asked him a question—she would never dare; he was not of those whom men care to interrogate. He came and went like a being strayed out of another planet, and no man asked him whence he came nor whither he went.

Presently she spoke: "Do you know it is getting time for you to go in. The sun will dip behind the hill in a minute, and I am sure you shivered just now."

"What a tyrant you are!"

It was playfully spoken, yet there was a fretful weariness in the tone.

"Ah! when shall I lose this weight on all my limbs; this feeling as if I were bound with knotted cords? I verily believe it is because you keep me moithered up with your blankets and your feather beds, your broths and your possets. If only I could sleep under the stars once more, and tramp day long over the hills, I should soon be my own man again."

She turned away and began to fold up her work very neatly, very methodically.

"Phenice!"

"Well?" Her back was toward him still.

"Come here. Why are you offended? You know you must not expect the courtesy of a gentleman from a tramp."

"Courtesy! Do you think I want that?" She broke off suddenly.

He held out his hand to her, and almost against her will she went back to her old station and knelt down close beside him.

"My dear," he said, "why will you be so foolish?"

When he spoke in that tender voice it thrilled her to the very inmost of her being. A tear forced its way under the eyelid she strove to hold so steady, and dropped on the hand that was holding hers, with a little splash.

"There!" he said. "I have made you cry, ungrateful beast that I am! And ungrateful beast whose life you have saved, too. What can I do?—except obey you and come indoors like a good boy."

He rose feebly and leaned his weight upon her shoulder as they crossed the two fields that divided their resting place from the farm. Nothing could have brought her such sense of comfort as that weight: at least, he could not do without her yet; it must, at least, be long before he could tramp once more over the hills and far away, and be lost to her ken for months and years, as he had been before and would be again, as she well knew.

At the gate stood Andrew Everard with his gun

over his shoulder, and two rabbits, their pretty fur all dabbled with blood, dangling from his hand. He waited as he saw the two approaching.

"I am glad to see you about again."

The words were civil, but the tone was curt and the manner something awkward withal. Everard did not feel at ease with his guest, and scarcely knew how to address him. A perfectly unaccountable impulse prompted him to say "sir"—"sir," to a tramp! It would seem more fitting that the respectful word should be used by the homeless vagabond to the young master of Priestlands.

"Thanks. I shall soon be able to set forward on my way again, I hope, but my kind nurse won't hear of my starting just yet. In fact," he added, as he leaned upon the gate, "I'm afraid I shall have to trespass on your hospitality a few days longer. My legs won't carry me far yet."

"You are very welcome, sir, I'm sure." The word slipped out quite unconsciously, in deference to an indefinable something in the tramp's tone.

The sick man had, however, got on wonderfully well. Phenice's nursing, under the guidance of nature's promptings, had helped the healthy temperament to make a good fight against disease, and instead of the six or eight weeks the doctor had prophesied, it was but five since the fever had laid him low; and every morning now Phenice took him his early draught of milk with a foreboding lest she might find her caged bird flown. She knew it could not be long now.

Though the feeble limbs still kept him chained, the

quick, bright mind had soon shaken off the oppression of fever and weakness, and he had come downstairs for many evenings now and sat in the inglenook. As Phenice stepped in and out of the room, busied with her household tasks, she listened to the odd sing-song voice that went on and on, musing the old man in the chimney-corner with travellers' tales. Were they really "Travellers' Tales" in the common acceptation; or had he actually lived through all those queer experiences, those marvellous adventures that made his listener take the pipe from his lips and hold it suspended till it went out, in sheer, breathless absorption?

Talk of pipes! What wonderful, fragrant weed was that with which the traveller's pouch was always filled? The dim bluish clouds, like incense, seemed to make a fitting medium in which the marvellous tales floated like myths.

When the table had been cleared, the dairy affairs seen to, and the batch of bread for to-morrow put to rise, Phenice would bring her great mending basket, and seat herself noiselessly in the other corner of the settle; weaving in strange fancies as she drew her long needle in and out. Perhaps it lent an added charm to those evenings to know that, with the coming of spring, they would melt away like the winter snows.

To-night when she came in he broke off suddenly in his talk.

"Phenie, where's my fiddle?"

"I'll fetch it; I've got it quite safe upstairs."

She had carried it off for safety to her own room while he was ill, and there it lay on the chest of

drawers opposite her bed. All her little knicknacks and photographs had been thrust aside to make room for it, and for five weeks it had been the last thing she saw before sleeping and the first on waking. It seemed the first stroke of severance, and she well knew what it meant. As she lifted it she felt like the foster-mother who is bidden to dress her nursling for the last time, before giving him up to the hands that have the better right. Very tenderly she opened the case and dusted the glowing amber varnish softly with a fine silk handkerchief; then she took it from its bed, like a baby from its cradle, and held it a minute, just as she had seen the fiddler hold it, and laid her cheek down on the spot where the varnish was nearly rubbed away. Then quickly, like a guilty thing, she put it back, fastened the case, and ran downstairs with it.

She watched Jasper jealously as he took it out and fondled it and bent his ear down to it, asking its response as he tuned each string; inquiring, as it were, whether it had been well cared for in its master's absence. Did he ever, she wondered, look down at any mere human creature with such caressing love in his eyes?

"Now," he said, suddenly straightening himself, "shall I play to you?"

Phenice had taken her work-basket and threaded her needle, but the needle dropped from her fingers, and the white seam slipped unheeded to the floor, for she was away, wandering with the musician along the winding road that went into the heart of the sunset.

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Old George Everard leaned forward, his pipe between his teeth, quite gone out—no longer a tired, worn-out old man in the chimney-corner, but hale and strong; doing all the things he had only dreamed of all his best days.

Polly set her clinking pots and pans down softly and stole within the door. In a few weeks it would be Tan Hill fair; already she could feel her Dick's arm about her waist as they flew on in the madness of the Giddy-go-round.

Andrew stood in the other doorway in his heavy-caped coat. His sombre eyes lighted; he had ceased to reckon the loss of the ewes against the gain of the lambs; perhaps, after all, he should win the woman of his heart's desire, and the sun would shine out again, although it was evening.

Behind him, in the passage, stood young Zack. He would go for a soldier; ay, so he would! No more traipsing over muddy fields for him; he would don the khaki and march to victory behind the band! Tantara, tantara!

It was all there: the whole story of Jasper's wanderings; the mad adventures, the lonely pilgrimages, the busy world of the West, the fantastic, dreaming world of the East; perilous nights on stormy seas, hushed nights on the lonely hills under the stars; roads that travelled to the busy haunts of men, and roads through dim forests; stories fierce, stories grotesque, stories pathetic, and stories of the ways of the little dumb beasts that nestle closest to the great heart of Mother Earth. The whole history of the wanderer's life found utterance, and those that had ears

to hear might hear, but to each it told his own story. That is the way with music; to each it speaks in his own tongue wherein he was born.

When the fiddle ceased to speak no one was the wiser as to who Mr. Jasper was nor where he came from.

## IV.

In the corner of the rarely used best parlour of the farmhouse, where the blinds were generally half down, stood a tall, shrouded shape which in her childish days used to fill Phenice with a wondering awe; the more as no one would tell her what it was, and she had been strictly forbidden to touch it. She well remembered one occasion when grandad and grannie had driven off to market together and her cousin Andrew was at school, she had crept in there to make her own investigations, with a sense of heinous sin upon her soul. She had a little outgrown the age when she expected it to bite her as a judgment for her disobedience, yet still went in some fear of the mysterious thing, and when, as she groped with timid fingers for the fastening of the green baize, her hand caught in something and a sound that was almost music suddenly issued forth, she fled affrighted nor stayed her steps till she was in the cow-house, safe in the reassuring company of the cows and the cowman who was milking them.

She longed to unburden her soul and ask what—nay, who—stood muffled in the corner and spoke in such a strange voice, but dared not mention so terrible an experience. And if she had screwed up her courage to speak, Leander Spreadbury would proba-

bly have answered with the formula wherewith he met all inconvenient queries: "I dunno."

Later she came to know that it was her mother's harp, which had stood there untouched since the evening that the player had handled it for the last time before bidding good-night to all her daily tasks and all the little accomplishments that had been her father's pride. She had broken off short in the melody she was playing, for her hour had come, and had laid herself meekly down upon her bed of pain, only to leave it for the more peaceful bed under the churchyard wall. It was there that her sailor husband found her when he returned from his long voyage, and the little girl she had left behind her failed to comfort him. He sailed away again before the baby could toddle, and her grandparents' was the only care that Phenice had known.

Until she had grown up Phenice heard but little of her mother, not that the daughter was forgotten in her home, but rather because the memory was too poignant to be spoken of till many softening years had come between; but, as she grew to womanhood, the garrulity of age loosened grannie's tongue, and the old woman came to love descanting on the ways and doings of her one daughter, her pretty Sylvia, on whom so much loving care had been lavished. All the little treasures and trinkets that had belonged to the lost one,—her coral necklace, her gold ear-rings, the very ribbons she had tied her hair with,—were brought out and displayed with many a fond recollection.

"You can have 'em when I'm gone, Phenie," grannie would say; "though you'll never do 'em the

credit your poor mother did; you aint half so pretty as she was. I shan't part with 'em while I live."

They were all Phenice's now, and so was the inlaid workbox with yellow satin linings and silver fittings that stood on the little rosewood table in the window, for grannie could not take her treasures with her when she went, but they were just as carefully and reverently kept.

Not in an ordered narrative, but bit by bit, here a little and there a little, Phenice had learned the simple story of her mother's life: of the late-sent treasure born when her brother was almost a man and the parents verging on middle-age, and so made the more of; of the hard-earned savings scraped together to give her a real good education, though it half broke their hearts to send her away to a boarding school in a distant town; of the old story of disappointment when the grown-up girl would think for herself and choose for herself, and instead of accepting the prosperous miller, whom both father and mother pressed upon her as in every way desirable, gave her heart to a handsome, harum-scarum sailor, and nearly broke it when he was sent away. The power of weakness prevailed; they could not see their treasure pine; when he came back the marriage was allowed, with the compensation that, on his next long voyage, Sylvia was left at the farm in her mother's care.

Very little was ever told Phenice about her father: the bare fact that he was drowned in the Pacific not long after his wife's death was briefly told her, and he remained almost a myth to her. There were mementoes of him, too, in the best parlour alongside of

her mother's treasures, all sorts of strange things: queer and hideous idols; delicate tea-cups and rare china bowls which she kept filled with dried rose-leaves and lavender; and Japanese curios, very unlike those which at Christmas time could be bought in the cheap shop at the bottom of Dronechester High Street. Besides those there were the big spotted shells which told Phenice weird tales of the lands her father had visited, or of "the deep's untrampled floor" where now he lay.

That Mr. Jasper could tell her where all these things came from, what were their uses, and what sort of people they had belonged to, was not the least among his many fascinations. Phenice, like her mother, had had her boarding-school education; grandmother's chicken-money had been once more drawn upon for that; but it was not of the kind which led her to connect her curiosities with the countries in the geography books. Mr. Jasper's stories gave them a kind of life and personality. She had learned music, too, but the harp had gone out of fashion before her day, and all she knew of it she had picked out for herself from the dusty old manuscript books and the yellow-covered "Tutor" that lay at the bottom of the cupboard.

One afternoon Phenice was running across from the cow-house with a shawl over her head, for it was raining, when she heard from the open window of the parlour a strange sound of rippling music, quite unlike the strains of Jasper's violin. She stood quite still for an instant, letting the rain drive in her face and cling like tiny beads to her hair and to the fringe

of her shawl. To be sure! The harp! that was what it was. Well, there was not much that Mr. Jasper could not do; he had even given voice to the poor dumb thing that had been all unstrung and tuneless for so long.

She threw off her shawl in the passage, shook the drops out of her hair, and went in.

"So that was what you wanted all those queer things from the music shop for the last time we went into town. I couldn't think. But whatever is the use? I shall never be able to play it."

"We never know what we can do till we try. Get me a pair of scissors."

Jasper lifted his ruffled head from his task, and held out his hand, secure that whatever he asked Phenice for would be immediately forthcoming. They were, of course. She would not even keep him waiting while she fetched her working scissors from her basket in the kitchen, but produced the little delicate pointed pair that belonged to her mother's workbox, over which she was so wonderfully choice as a rule. Those refined-looking hands never blunted or broke anything; she was not afraid to trust them to him.

For a while she stood watching him in silence, wondering what was to be the outcome of this new freak of his. At length he had finished tying and twisting, and had brought every string up into due harmony.

"Now," he said, as he straightened himself; "come and sit down here and try it."

She began to excuse herself, saying, "Oh, but, Mr.

Jasper, I couldn't really; I haven't practised for years——" But he disposed of her objections with a little wave of his hand.

"Go on," he said, and she seated herself obediently.

As she ran her fingers over the strings, at first timidly, tentatively, the feeling of them awoke a memory, a faculty that had been long slumbering, but which never dies in those who have the inherited sense of harmony. Gradually the chords emerged in a simple clef, tonic, dominant, subdominant, and back again, and then an excursion into another clef. Jasper sprang up.

"I told you so!" he cried. "I am going to fetch the fiddle."

Phenice resisted no more. If Mr. Jasper said she could, why, of course, she could, or he could make her. She yielded up her will to the dominance of his, and presently she found herself borne along on a stream of melody, supporting, completing the simple air he played with rippling chords that flowed like running water. At the end she looked up in his face, her eyes brimming with a childlike delight.

"Ah," he said, "that is better than that miserable old pianette of yours, eh? That harp is a fine old instrument, Phenie. I must teach you to play some other things on it. After all," he added musingly, "the fiddle, supreme though he be, is but an incomplete creature alone. When I go away, you and the harp will have to come with me."

She took that as a mere jest, yet, deep down, something thrilled in her at the thought that the fiddle

could not do without the sustaining, fulfilling undertones that should accompany it; that the man's soul, lonely, self-reliant though it were, yet sometimes needed the woman's aid. She said nothing; if her thought were expressed at all, it uttered itself in the chords that seemed to lean to him when they played again.

How marvellously he taught her! and how marvellously she learned in the days that followed! If she blamed herself at all for neglecting her usual work, she quieted her conscience with the assurance that nothing else would have kept her patient out of mischief; without it, as he grew stronger he would assuredly have gone rambling out in the spring rains, getting wet through, or braving the winds of March, which had still a biting tooth.

Many things she learned by heart under his guidance; stranger still, by a curious intuition that she did not know till then that she possessed, there came to her the faculty of improvising with him, of catching and following his thought and fulfilling it with the needed chord. How she did it, she herself could least of all have told; whether by a species of thought-reading, or a magnetic influence of his mind on hers, was quite beyond her power to explain.

Meanwhile the daffodils faded, and the primroses, first coyly peeping out in sheltered nooks, were presently poured out in reckless profusion over all the sloping coppices. March rounded into April, and still Jasper lingered.

The moonlight lay in broad white shafts across the faded carpet in the parlour and just touched with

edges of silver the shells and china cups on Phenice's cabinet; the half-glass door that opened straight into the garden stood wide, for the night was mild, and the pungent scent of the red flowering-currant outside stole in, while the shadow of its little coral bunches stirred gently over the pallid patch on the floor. Jasper was almost invisible as he stood with his shoulder against the jamb of the door, but the white moonlight touched Phenice and caught the hands that were moving over the harp-strings.

Across the passage through the open door the logs on the hearth glowed red, and the circle of light from the lamp shone on grandad's bald head and silver-rimmed spectacles as he sat to the bureau, busy with his books. Jasper had beckoned Phenice out, and she had laid down her full mending basket and followed him. She would lay down anything now to do his bidding.

He had been teaching her some weird gipsy dances, and the sudden changes had puzzled her, and she feared she had vexed him by her stupidity, but here in the moonlight the lilt of the thing had come to her. First a measured rhythm like the rocking of a swing, and then suddenly a whirl, faster, faster, till the swinging beat came again and slackened. She felt as though she were dancing with him, spinning in some wild measure over green lawns, through change of shine and shadow. When they ceased, for a minute or two neither spoke; when he did his words went through her like a knife.

"To-morrow, Phenice, I must go on my way again."

She had known it must come. Her hands sank down from the harp-strings and lay in her lap.

He played a little run, with a marvellous trill at the end.

"Why shouldn't you come with me? you and the harp?" Then, as there was no answer, "Do you remember how you told me you always longed to know what lies beyond the hills? I can show you what lies beyond those and other hills mightier than those. We might ramble together through countries where Nature is still wild and beautiful as God made her. Don't you want to come, Phenie?"

Was ever so strange a wooing?

Phenice made a despairing clutch at her sane everyday self that seemed on the point of eluding her. This moonstruck, pallid woman, whose breath came short, whose heart beat wildly as though it would stifle her, should not answer for her.

"You are talking nonsense, Mr. Jasper. I am going to bed."

"And what music we might make together—you and I," he went on, as if he had not heard her. "I could carry the harp slung over my shoulder, and we would take our music into strange, wild places where they seldom hear any. Such a free life, Phenie! Such a fair life it would be!"

She had stepped out into the passage, and stood midway between the lamplight and the moonlight. She turned back and spoke over her shoulder:

"You are speaking wild," she said. "You don't mean what you say."

Perplexity rose in the clear, amber eyes like a cloud.

"I never wanted to marry any woman before," he said musingly. "Do they always turn round like this, I wonder?"

"Good-night," she said in a curt tone. "You'll have come to your senses by the morning, I make no doubt, and then I wonder what you'd have said if I was to have taken you at your word."

He made a long stride after her and caught her hand at the foot of the stairs.

"Do you think I'm drunk, or have got the fever back, that I should not know what I am saying?" He bent his head to her and spoke low. "I thought you loved me, Phenice."

She snatched her hand away.

"You've no right to say so! You've no right to think so!" she cried, and disappeared up the winding stairs. He gave one glance into the lamplit kitchen at the bald head that stooped over the scratching pen, and then slipped out into the hush of the night amongst the gnarled shadows in the orchard.

Upstairs Phenice lit her candle and proceeded to undress herself in the same methodical way she had done every night of her life, though all the time she was gripping that other woman by the throat. She folded her clothes and laid them one by one on a chair, brushed and plaited her long brown hair, and said her prayers as she might have said an Abracadabra; then she put the candle out and looked out of the window, as she always did the last thing. A long, gaunt shadow moved waveringly under the white blossoms in the orchard. For a long while she watched. Would he come in? Ah, God! would he

go away? That other whom she was holding down made a desperate effort to get free and slip out into the night, but she held firm.

All night she lay in her bed rigid and straight, with the clothes drawn smoothly up to her chin, and all night a bird in the pear tree outside sang of the life Jasper had pictured; a life of wandering and of music and of love.

Again and again she answered that Jasper was not of the stuff of which husbands are made; as well think to marry a Will-o'-the-wisp or a merman. And still the bird sang on, and the burden of his song was: "Love is enough."

## V.

THE broad, smiling sun was beginning to peer over the dip by the Devil's Punchbowl, and the long ridges from the Old Beacon to the Warren were washed with liquid crimson; the slopes seemed made of rainbow stuff where the low beams smote the dew-laden grass-blades, and all the sky was full of music, for a thousand larks were springing up to greet the new day. In Phenice's garden the clumps of sweet Nancies and wine-dark wallflowers bowed their heads and breathed an incense sweeter than anything the noonday sun would draw forth, and the heavy drops brought down the rosy petals from the apple trees in a shower.

Still and silent was it over the downs, but all about the house were sounds of farm life astir: the swish of a scythe through the grass somewhere at the back; Polly's hearty voice, singing about her work; the clucking of fowls; the clinking of pails, and from the long shed the lowing of the cows. Smiting across it all with a sound like a bell, from the copse in the hollow—"Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!"

Fairest hour of the day—of the whole year—which we nineteenth-century folk, who are so much wiser than our fathers, spend in bed with blankets pulled well up to our ears and the blinds drawn down. Perhaps, after all, Jasper, who never missed such a morning, was not so crazy as some people believed him.

In the cow-shed the dusk still lingered; at the far end it was almost dark, and the smockfrock of Leander Spreadbury only showed as a faint blur of light against the sides of Buttercup, the dun cow. Nearer the door shafts of bluish light fell slantwise upon Phenice enveloped in a huge snow-white pinafore, with the sleeves of her pink cotton blouse rolled up above her elbow; a sun-bonnet was on her head, and, as she rested her forehead against the cow she was milking, nothing but the curve of cheek and chin was visible. Jasper stood in the doorway, watching her fingers coaxing down the milk and listening to the tinkle it made against the sides of the pail. She did not know he was there, and when he spoke she started.

"Well, Phenie, has the night brought counsel?"

She answered, without looking round, "Hush! Leander is there, and his ears are as sharp as a needle, for all he looks so old."

Then, after a minute, "I thought you were gone."

"Gone? no. Have you forgotten last night?"

"I think we had better." She rose as she spoke, without turning toward him, and, picking up her pail and stool, moved to the next cow. He followed her.

"Phenie."

"Go now: I wish you would."

She did not know whether he obeyed her or not; the frills of her bonnet shut out all but her milk-pail, and his step was so light that the tinkle of falling milk drowned it. The next thing she heard was Leander's clumping foot as he carried his pail from the end of the shed; he paused near her, and she looked round. His old soft felt hat, all hairy in front where he leaned

against the cows, was pulled down over his ears, and in his mouth he held a sprig of wallflower like a pipe. With his wrinkled face and childish blue eyes he looked like an old withered baby.

"So the fiddler's a-courtin' of ye," he said, without taking the flower from his lips. "I wouldn't have nought to do wi' 'un, missie, ef I was you. You stick to the young measter. He'll marry ye soon or syne, ef ye holds on."

He picked up her milking stool and, tucking it under his arm, stumped away, a heavy pail in each hand, towards the dairy. She stood still in the shadow where he had left her, slowly pulling down her sleeves.

So this was what the farm servants said of her among themselves, was it? that she was "holding on" in the hope of wedding her cousin! Her cheeks under the sun-bonnet flamed. She had always known, without a definite word having been said, that this was what her grandfather looked forward to; his bit of money must be divided else, and the farm would suffer from lack of capital; but she was not a piece of property to be put in settlement and handed from parent to husband. If Andrew had wanted her, he should have wooed her. Probably he had been too secure; he was a slow man and very well content with things as they were; busy always, the days drifted by, and till his rights were threatened he would hardly have spoken the decisive word.

A little while ago, and she would have acquiesced in the family arrangement, but now—why the mere thought of Andrew as a husband seemed a kind of

infidelity—an outrage. An outrage on what? Did she then for a moment contemplate marrying the other? Was she thinking seriously of his wild words? Of course not. What sane woman would dream of tramping off with Jasper into the unknown? Yet at least she knew now that no other man's eyes must ever look into hers—no other man's hand ever touch her as Jasper's had done.

And then she started, for he was close beside her and took her hand.

"Come," he said,—half persuasive, half commanding,—"come up to the Old Beacon." And she yielded.

Hand in hand they went together up the shimmering slopes, across the dip of the ancient fosse, till they stood side by side under the group of shaggy pines that crowned the height. Here the sun was pouring his full glory of light and heat; below, in the hollow, the city lay asleep in the shadow. All the air was in a charm with the larks. They had not talked as they went, but now Jasper took her other hand and, making her turn towards him, looked into her face.

"Aren't you mine, Phenice?"

She raised her troubled eyes and looked into his. "Perhaps, but are you mine?"

"Why do you doubt it?"

"I don't know, except that I feel as if I only half knew you. You seem as a foreigner might to me—only more than a foreigner."

"Do I? And yet you love me."

"Why will you say that? I never told you so."

"Do you remember that night I came to you, sick

and weary? When you folded your arms round me you took me prisoner; you have held me prisoner ever since, and now that I must go, I cannot go without you."

Phenice answered in a half-stifled tone, "Because when you were sick and weak I nursed, you fancy you cannot do without me; you think you want me, but you don't, you don't."

"Don't I?" he said softly. "Then why can't I go away? What is it is holding me here against my will? Do you know one morning very early, before even you, early bird as you are, were astir, I started: I had got as far as that farthest ridge over yonder where you can see the sea, and I came back. Can you guess why? Because I had not said good-bye to you. And when I got back and looked into those clear eyes, like still grey pools, I found it was not good-bye I wanted to say—never good-bye."

Phenice was trembling, and she did not answer.

"If that is to be the word between you and me, it must be for good. I shall never come back again. I must go on and on till I put half the world between us, till distance may break that string that you have fastened round my heart."

She looked across the valley to where the white road emerged from the shadows and caught the sunlight before it vanished over the crest of the hill, and she pictured her vagabond lover travelling along it till he too vanished over the rim of her world into the land where things happened, where every day was not the counterpart of the one before it. She pictured herself treading her daily round—her bread-

making, her butter-making, her poultry-keeping; a good life enough, but one where each day repeated another; where Saturday brought the drive to the market town and the week's shopping, Sunday brought church and leisure to sit still with a good book, and Monday began again with counting the linen for the wash. Could she stay and bear it while he wandered so far that the tie between them at last should snap? And if it did, what of her? He would soon be healed in his wild, wandering life, but she would slowly bleed to death inwardly, she knew.

And if she said yes to him and put her hand in his, what a plunge into the unknown! It made her giddy to think of it.

He had moved a little away and stood on the crumbled cairn, where the fallen stones lay overgrown with nettles.

"Oh, I did not want to love you!" he exclaimed. "I always resolved I would never let any woman come into my life to mar it. Do as you will. Some day I suppose it will cease to hurt, and I shall hug my freedom again."

A lark overhead was singing loud and shrill, and he was trying to tell Phenice the same tale that the nightingale had told her last night. She listened, then went to Jasper and laid her hand in his.

"It is madness, I know, but I am yours; I will go with you where you will."

. . . . .

As they came down from the lone hill-top and the sunrise into the shadows of the house, their spirits must needs come down from the meeting of soul with

soul, from the clear vision of the spirit world into the busy workaday life, into the dusty cares of ordinary living. At least Phenice's must; Jasper evaded it very simply by taking a crust and a jug of milk and breakfasting in the orchard, among the linnets and thrushes.

She closed her inner eyes resolutely while she saw to the needs of her household, though she knew that presently she must encounter the practical difficulties of an impossible situation; must tell her grandfather of the incomprehensible step she had taken; must ask his consent, as though it were an ordinary engagement she had entered into. She drove it off as long as she could; she would fain get a little used to the strange notion before she tried to put it into words. It was preposterous, even to her; yet already it was as true as though it had always been.

While she was busy with her household tasks she found grandad had gone off to the distant fold, to settle with Andrew which of the lambs should be driven into market on Saturday. At any rate, now she could not speak before the afternoon; better so—she did not want to be hurried.

As she slipped into the garden for a handful of mint, Jasper, who had been lurking in the orchard, caught her.

"Phenice, when shall we go? I am getting restless and impatient."

"Go?" she cried. "Why, you talk as if one could get married and walk off in an afternoon; no sooner said than done. Why, I haven't even spoke to grandad yet."

He looked at her with apprehension and dismay. "Look here, Phenice; if you want marriage settlements, orange blossoms, bridesmaids, and a veil, I'm——"

"Nay," she said reproachfully, "but one must surely tell one's own folks. I can't walk off to church with you and then clear away as if I were doing something I was ashamed of. If you want me, you must take me honest from the hands of my own people."

"Ay, of course," he responded. "You are right. God forbid I should do anything shabby by the old man whose bread I have eaten these many weeks! Only I hate a fuss—and I suppose you understand you can't take a trousseau on tramp?"

"'Tisn't the outsides I care for, my dear, any more than you do yourself; only I must have everything straight between me and them I owe my duty to."

"Well, how long are you going to keep me on tenterhooks?" The restless hands twisted a spray of apple-blossom till it snapped and the petals fell at his feet.

She went close to him and laid her two hands on his shoulders, looking into his face.

"Go now, my dear," she said; "this very hour, if you will. If you love me, you will come back. Better stay away a week; then come again, and I will have settled things and made ready."

"You are a wise woman, Phenie. Yes, that will be best."

He went into the house for his fiddle and the small knapsack which contained the few worldly goods he ever encumbered himself with, and in a few minutes

she saw him striding over the upland pasture that led to the London road. She stood still by the garden gate where he had left her, her hand pressed hard against her side, her teeth biting into the soft lower lip that would tremble. Something climbed chokingly in her throat, but she would not give it way, and tried to hold down the thought that clutched her heart.

If he could go like this, then surely he never would come back. Her brief dream ended before it well began. Well, she had known last night that it was a dream—a frenzy. The sooner over the better.

She went indoors and occupied herself busily, but presently she paused in her occupation of chopping mint. The ears of her heart were keen, and she was aware of a light step brushing through the still dew-laden grass. She went out.

"Have you forgotten something?" she said.

He did not speak, but he held out his arms to her, and she looked in his eyes and understood. For a moment she leaned on his breast and felt his arms folded round her, his cheek against her cheek, his lips on her lips. Then, without another word, he was gone, but she knew now that, though seas might roll between them, she could never really be parted from him any more.

## *BOOK II.*

### HEDGED IN.

Give to me the life I love,
  Let the lave go by me.
Give the jolly heaven above,
  And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
  Bread I dip in the river—
There's the life for a man like me,
  There's the life for ever.

. . . . .

Wealth I seek not, hope, nor love,
  Nor a friend to know me;
All I ask, the heaven above
  And the road below me.

—*R. L. Stevenson.*

Your shepherd is very near to Earth. He grows up from her lap, he never quite leaves her bosom: he is her foster-child. He may hear her heart-beats and drink of her tears. If she smile, he knoweth why. He has listened and he knoweth. She telleth him her secret thoughts; all the day long he may lie close in her arms. No man so proper for that sweet bed; no man may be so ready to die and mingle with her.

—*Maurice Hewlett.*

# I.

PHENICE waited to make her communication till dinner should be over and her cousin gone out again, till the room was restored to its placid afternoon order, noiseless but for the loud, steady ticking of the eight-day clock, and the low buzz of the flies engaged in an intricate dance, marking the time with a reiterated tap as they knocked their heads against the ceiling. Grandad had established himself, according to custom, in the bee-hive chair, with a large red silk bandanna over his bald head to keep off the aforesaid flies, the newspaper spread upon his knees, and his long "churchwarden" between his lips.

Neither did she use many words about it when her opportunity was come, but stated the fact briefly; standing straight and tall in front of him, before she sat down to her needlework.

"Grandad, Mr. Jasper wants me to marry him."

"Eh! What?" The old man snatched the handkerchief off his head impatiently and threw it aside; the news had murdered sleep for that afternoon, quietly as it had been told.

It is not easy to repeat such an announcement; Phenice did it, however, only altering the form slightly.

"I have promised to marry Mr. Jasper, grandfather."

"Good Lord!" The churchwarden snapped in two, and he threw the bits on the fire as he would fain have thrown the bits of the betrothal he meant to break.

"Are you crazed, Phenice? You that are as good as promised to your cousin!"

She drew up her long throat. "I'm nothing of the sort. Andrew has never asked me, and if he had——"

"The lad was a fool not to speak out. He took it all for granted, to be sure, same as I did. If this is a trick to draw him on it may be a clever one, but it's what I'd never have thought of you."

Slowly a dim red spread under her sunburnt skin, from the white collar that encircled her throat up under the tendrils of soft hair on her forehead.

"If it was anyone else said such a thing to me, I'd give them an answer that wouldn't be becoming from me to you," she said. "I should have thought you knew me well enough to know I wasn't likely to act that way. Andrew, indeed! What do I want with Andrew! And if I had, do you suppose I should lower myself?"

"Ay, I know it, and that is what 'mazes me; that it should be you—you——"

"I've done nothing to be ashamed of. Mr. Jasper came and asked me for my love, honest and honourable, and I have given it to him."

George Everard groaned. "Good God, girl! how could you give your love to one you know nought about. Who is he? Where does he come from? By Heaven! if you so much as know his name it is more than I do."

The red sank away and left her white. Till this minute she had never remembered that in truth she did not so much as know his name; that the man who had become nearest and dearest to her in the whole world, to whom she had given what in all her twenty-five years of maiden life she had never given to mortal man before, was in sober verity an utter stranger; that not his name only, but his whole personality, save for these few weeks of helpless dependence on her, was a mystery. And yet she was ready to leave the home of her childhood, the dear familiar fields, the faces that had smiled on her from her babyhood, to put her hand in his and follow him blindfold, the wide world through.

Her grandfather looked at her for nearly a minute. "Well," he said at last, "and what is his name, then, if you know it?"

"He will tell you himself when you ask him." And Phenice turned away.

"Will he? Has he a name at all, I wonder, this tramping vagabond who has taken advantage of my charity and dared to ask for my granddaughter?"

Had he? And did it really matter whether he had or not? He was just Jasper; that denoted the real man; the other, the surname, meant so little—and yet so much; custom, convention, environment, the very garment wherewith the real man is clothed and is visible to the surrounding world. We cannot go about with naked souls any more than with unclad bodies in the civilised world, as Herr Teufelsdröckh perceived when he tried to strip humanity of extraneous trappings.

"I shall have a good many more things to ask him than that when he comes in to-night," said the old man, struggling with a sense of impotent bewilderment that was like a bad dream.

"He isn't coming back to-night; he has gone away for a week. I wished it; I thought it would be best to have a little time to tell you and get you used to it before you spoke to him. I thought—I knew it would seem strange at first."

The odd thing was that it no longer seemed strange to her; this morning it had been impossible; now, since she had lain on his breast and felt his cheek against hers, it was an old, old story.

"We will not talk any more about it now," she said; "we shall only vex each other. I shall go out and get a breath of fresh air."

Left alone, old Everard rose from his chair and gave himself a shake, took off his spectacles, and made a few shuffling turns across the room. Surely, surely this was only a strangely vivid and painful dream. There was an unreality about the whole thing. Phenice's calm, matter-of-fact manner, too, seemed more like a dream than the way such a thing would be told by any person in their senses—but then, no one in their senses would have such a thing to tell. The whole thing was impossible—grotesque. That Phenice of all people, no giddy girl, but a woman grown and sensible beyond most, pledged too, as he held, to her cousin, could for a moment contemplate flinging herself away upon an unknown vagabond, as though she were bewitched, was monstrous—could not be. Either she the teller, or he the hearer, must

have been crazed and dreaming. He certainly must have been crazed to have listened to such a recital and said as little as he had. Looking back on the brief scene, he seemed to have let the matter establish itself as one that might be debated later on. Ah, he was growing old, old and feeble. He took another turn through the room; it seemed impossible to sit still with such a thing in the air.

And then he remembered another scene of years ago, like, but how unlike, when he had tried to stem the vagaries of a girl's heart. Phenice was not like her mother; she had borne herself very differently. Sylvia had wept and wailed, had yielded, and then had pined herself sick and so got her own way, after all, lest she should die. And she had died and left her daughter to tread the same wilful road. But Phenice was different; she had not cried, neither would she break her heart, yet the chill conviction came over him that, in spite of all, she, too, would take her own way.

That week was full of heavy days for Phenice. There was no arguing, no reproaches; her grandfather and her cousin were both silent men. Perhaps they thought that, by refusing to give words to what had so deeply offended them both, they refused to give an acknowledged existence to it, but their silence lay on her with a weight like frost. It was more than silent disapproval; on the younger man's part at least, it was contempt. "They could hardly treat me worse," she said to herself, "if I had disgraced them."

She longed sometimes for the presence of another

woman in the house; less perhaps for a woman's sympathy than for her outspoken reproaches or dissuasions. That, at least, would rouse antagonism; this wordless condemnation froze her will, forced her to look at her conduct through their eyes.

Phenice had, though she did not know it, a singular gift of imaginative sympathy; a power of putting herself in other people's places, of seeing as they saw. She was dismayed when she looked at herself as they were looking at her. That a woman brought up in the ordered quiet of a country home, shielded from evil, aloof alike from the distractions of a higher class as from the coarse temptations of a lower, who had looked forward to fulfilling the same round of duties as wife of a man she had known and trusted from her babyhood as she had done as daughter of the house, not light-minded nor vain, but rather staid—that such an one should suddenly fling aside her dignified and modest traditions at the bidding of a nameless tramp must surely seem to them preposterous; nay, it seemed so to herself.

Yet, though she thought of it thus, thought of it with anguish, still her will stood firm; the possibility of giving Jasper up now never crossed her mind. Her duty and her devotion were owing to him now rather than to those to whom she had owed them these five-and-twenty years.

The postman was a rare visitor at Priestlands; its inhabitants were none of them people who indulged in much correspondence. Relatives were few and, unless a death or a wedding in the family were to be communicated, seldom wasted time over pen and

paper. In fact, he so seldom had to turn out of his way that it was quite a grievance when he needs must, so when one morning, as Phenice came out of the milking shed she descried him getting over the stile in the field path from the village, she went across to intercept him.

She told herself she did not expect anything from Jasper; he was one who seemed, when absent, too utterly gone for ordinary links of post or telegraph to unite him to those he left behind. No, most likely it was only a letter from one of her old schoolfellows who had suddenly remembered her, or some business letter for her grandfather, but something carried her up the hill like the wind.

"Well, you be in a hurry, to be sure," growled the postman, "and quite in a flutter like, and I aint got nothin' for ye, after all; only some'at for the old man. Here he be," as he fumbled in the depths of his old leather bag.

She knew as she took it in her hand that it was from her lover, just as well as if she had been familiar with his handwriting. No detective could have scrutinised the outside with a finer sense of small indications than did she. The postmark was Lymedale; he could not be very far off, then. The writing was small, concise, illegible; very unlike the current clerkly hands of her grandfather's few correspondents. What could it be? Had he made up his mind to write and demand formal consent? Her heart was beating thick as she took it indoors and stood watching with a quivering impatience very foreign to her usual calm, as her grandfather took it in his hand, fumbled for his spec-

tacles with exasperating deliberation, put them on, and examined the outside before he broke the seal. Only a half-sheet with a few words scrawled across it; she could see that much, and within it a thin slip, with something lilac and red in the corner.

Everard looked at her over the top of his spectacles without saying anything, then called to Andrew.

"Hey?" said Andrew, coming in. "Hullo!" as he took the enclosure in his hand and looked at it. "Do you suppose it is good?"

"Easy to find out when you go into town to cash it. It is on the Southern Counties United."

"What does he say?"

"Little enough. Here, you may look at it, if you like. I don't altogether like the notion. I've never let, and I never meant to. He seemed cast upon our hands, a poor forlorn wastrel, as you may say. I didn't mean to make money out of him; never supposed he had any."

"A banking account!" said Andrew, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. "Why, the fellow must be cracked! What should he do tramping the country and fiddling for coppers, with money in the bank?"

"A name, too, did you notice? 'Tis signed Jasper Waring."

Phenice watched them, tingling with impatience. Did they mean to say nothing to her whom it so much concerned? And yet she could not ask; her sense of their hostility was too strong. She had common sense enough, with all her simplicity, to know how

much that slip of paper meant. It altered the position completely. Would it alter their view of it? A man with a banking account would surely stand on a different level to the "nameless tramp" whose advances had been treated with silent scorn. And yet, after all, it might but set him further from her. What unguessed barriers might stand behind that frail bit of paper? She shivered, thinking of it.

Andrew moved to leave the room, the cheque in his hand. She took a step to intercept him.

"What is it?" she demanded. "It is something from—from Mr. Jasper, isn't it?"

"I don't know yet what it is good for. You'll know in good time—if there is anything to know. If you have any sense or modesty you'll put the fellow and all that concerns him out of your head. It is plain enough from this he don't mean to come back." He spoke roughly and went out.

She turned desperately to her grandfather.

"Grandad, is there a letter? What does he say? Surely I have a right to know."

"That's all there is. There, you may see with your own eyes, if you want to."

He held out the scrap of paper, on which was scrawled, "With thanks for kindness and hospitality beyond what money could repay." "The meaning is very plain to my mind; he washes his hands of us, and a good job, too. He's been fooling you, my girl, and I'd never have thought you'd have been so weak as to let yourself be fooled. He never meant to marry you, or, if he did, for the minute-like, he has thought better of it since."

Phenice made no answer; she drew her breath hard, like one who toils under a heavy weight. Her grandfather looked at her apprehensively. He had been perhaps too harsh and sudden. Sylvia would have cried or fainted, but Phenice did not even speak. He laid a shaking hand on her shoulder.

"There, put him out of your head, like a good maid, as Andrew says, and things will all come right. 'Twill seem like a bad dream, and Dan 'll look over it. 'Tis my belief, for all his trampin' ways, the fellow was a gentleman born, masquerading for a lark. You was a little too kind to him, and he thought he'd have his bit of fun. But there's no harm done, eh?"

She would fain have flung off the hand, but it was old and trembled. He meant to be kind, poor old grandad: he did not understand. She drew away gently and went out. It is hard to stand firm against the convictions of those about you, and both men had gone unhesitatingly to the conclusion that the cheque meant that Jasper would never return; yet she knew —and they did not.

"His bit o' fun!" Well, it had not seemed to amuse him much. The bitter tone of his, "Oh, I did not want to love you!" and, "Perhaps some day it will cease to hurt," came to her mind with an assurance stronger than any protestations of love would have carried. He would come back.

"Well," said the old man, when Andrew got home from the market town the next evening, "I had a few words with Phenice after you were gone. Poor maid, she didn't say much. 'Tisn't pleasant to feel you've been made a fool of, but she will be a wise

girl and think no more of him. We'll forget it all; we'll forget it all."

Andrew was slowly hauling up from the depths of a capacious pocket the canvas bag which he always carried to market. "Forget it?" he said, when at length it came to the surface. "You may, perhaps; I shall not."

"Lad, you would not bear malice? You'd never give up Phenice, the girl you've loved your life long? Just for a moment's madness, which she's sorry enough for now, I'll be bound. Women's queer creatures always. We must make allowance."

"It's not a question of malice." He smoothed out some crisp notes and laid them on the table with a piece of gold on the top. "Simply I've been mistaken in Phenice all along. She is not the woman I took her for. Does she think I'd take the tramp's leavings?"

"Tramp! This don't look much like it," as he took up the notes and examined them. "What did you learn?"

"Little enough. He's good for this much, at any rate, but as to who or what he is, they were as close as wax—if they knew."

"Well, it don't matter, for we have seen the last of him."

Yet the old man sighed as he spoke—sighed for the wind from afar that should never blow through his dull, close life again. It was not only Phenice whom the tramping fiddler had bewitched.

## II.

By what lore does the swallow know her road across the wide plains and the pathless sea to the land where it is always summer? Who tells the blue tit in which garden he will find a split cocoa-nut hung up for his delight? Is there not some instinct, akin to these, which teaches the woman waiting for her lover by which of many roads he will return to her?

Something told Phenice. Where Jasper had spent the week of his banishment she had no idea, but, when the day came that was to bring him back to her, she took her way with quiet confidence along the green lane where she had found him first. She would not even let herself remember that her grandfather and Andrew had severally declared that the cheque meant he would never come again. If she had let herself think of it at all, she knew it was likely enough. He had dropped suddenly into her world out of the unknown, like the strayed denizen of another planet; into the unknown he might well vanish again—taking her heart with him. Yet, notwithstanding, she sat quietly on the bank waiting for him and looking along the green tunnel of overarching boughs the way that he would come.

It was an old, old road; tradition said it had once been the highway to London when the forest of the

Andredsweald had been so dense that even those resolute road-makers, the Romans, had had to turn aside and abandon the one they had begun. But now the highway took its unimpeded course far to the eastward, and the old way, untrodden from year's end to year's end, was grass-grown through all its course. Whatever it had done in the old time, it now only led from a disused chalk-pit out to the open down, where it presently lost itself in a maze of interlacing tracks. At rare intervals a cart, making a short cut from Priestlands to the Fulling Mills down by the water, would turn into it from the lower field gate and out again by the chalk-pit, making a faint three-fold track down the middle where the horse's hoofs and the heavy wheels crushed down the grass; or, in September, the children would come blackberrying in and out of its tangled hedgerows. Sometimes a shepherd would let his flock browse leisurely along its sides in shade and comfort, instead of hurrying them along the dusty high-road to the market town, but more often the solitude was unbroken.

As Phenice sat down a startled blackbird flew out from the hedge with loud, scolding protest, but in a few minutes all was still again. She took off her hat and leaned back, looking through the dim, green aisle, barred with shine and shadow, towards the down, for it was that way he had come before.

How well she remembered the autumn evening when she had found him first. She might well remember it, for life—nay, she herself—had been different ever since. By the time the cows were milked, and she had time to run out for the short rest she

prized, it was almost dusk, and it had been a grey day, with dripping rain now and again. How unspeakably dull and grey life had looked that evening! How unutterably same! How narrow the dip between the hills which bounded all she knew of life! She had not felt spirit enough in her to climb the height and look along the far-away road into the sunset, for what was the use of dreams? So she had turned dejectedly through the gate that hung awry on its hinges into the green lane, dank and sodden after the rain, where the brown leaves lay rotting under the nearly naked elms, and the wet dropped in beads from the trails of blackberry.

Yet it had not been all cheerless; here and there were dashes of vivid scarlet where the briony flung her wanton arms athwart the hedge, dangling her luscious blood-red clusters, and, if the trees were bare, they showed the more of the sky through their delicate, articulated tracery. For though the day had been so cloudy the evening had brought light, and down in the west was a broad band of lambent green shining between the black tree-boles. A robin's little heart had been so cheered by it that he sat upon the gate-post singing a loud song, and Jenny Wren, who shares with him the honours of winter, was flitting in and out of the thick places in the hedge where the ivy made a shelter.

As Phenice had walked and mused a sound of music came to her ear—a sound that seemed at first hardly real and put her in mind of Shepherd Chalke's foolish tales of the Pixies of olden time, who, according to him, had made their last haunt in Green Lane.

She had laughed softly to herself, wondering what he would make of this, for he solemnly averred that his grandfather's cousin, "a very sensible body," had seen them there one night when she made a short cut to her cottage, now in ruins, on her way home from market. "They was all capering about in crowds at the roadside," she said, "and laughed at her as she passed." That, by Shepherd Chalke's reckoning, was "pretty nigh a hundred year agone," and it was hardly likely any had lingered into this prosaic century; yet the strange figure who had sat so composedly on a tree-stump, fiddling, might well have been left behind when the rest stampeded before the steam-plough and the board-school.

Most women would have felt timid at encountering a fiddling tramp in so lonesome a spot at dusk, but, though Phenice's breath had come a little short with an odd sense that there might be something uncanny about the intruder, to dread harm from him somehow never occurred to her. Curiosity, too, was strong, so she had kept on her way. He stopped playing as she approached.

"Ah," he had said; "the world is not absolutely uninhabited, then? I began to think it was."

He was certainly too polite for a ghost, for he raised his hat as he spoke. The voice was like the voice of a gentleman, but his elbow was through his coat-sleeve, and the gap between his brown leggings and highlows revealed an absence of stocking that was to her mind conclusive.

"You have lost your way?" said Phenice in her soft, slow voice.

"Well, not exactly; because I had no way to lose; but it is true I don't know where I am."

"You have missed the road to Dronechester," she said. "You should have kept on to the left. I suppose you thought you would make a short cut across the downs, but this way will take you all down to the valley past the Fulling Mill. You'll be going to the October Lamb Fair?"

"Not I! I don't like Dronechester." He shrugged his shoulders and made a wry face. "I am coming up from the sea, and as to where I am going—well, a more important point to my mind is where I am going to sleep to-night, for it gets dampish for sleeping out, especially when one is fresh from hot countries."

"Hot countries?" she said with eager interest. "You're a traveller, then?"

"Something of the sort. And what do you know about hot countries, pray, that you look at me as if you were homesick for them?"

"Nothing," she answered; "and that is just it. It is not homesick I am, but wandersick. Sometimes I look at these walls of hills all round, and I wonder shall I ever see what lies the other side."

"Strange!" he said. "So you have got it, too. Well, I should never have thought it, to look at you. And women as a rule take root—like cabbages. Well, perhaps then you may feel for a wayfarer and show him where he may get shelter."

The end of it was Phenice had taken him to the farm for a bite and a sup before directing him to the New Inn on the Dronechester Road, and old Everard, falling under the spell of his weird stories and his

weirder tunes, gave him sleeping quarters for the night in the outhouse.

And since then he had come again and yet again. Was it all over now?

The stillness was absolute. Presently a lithe, red-brown creature with a tiny, flat head with quick, furtive eyes and a slim, stretched neck, slipped out from the long grass and nettles at the roadside and gambolled across the open; skipping to and fro and playing with last year's dead leaves, just as a kitten might. She turned her head to watch it and, slight as her movement was, like a flash it vanished. What was that, creeping along behind her, down the other side of the hedge, with noiseless, padding footfalls? She could just catch a glimpse, where the hedge was thin near the bottom, of a quaint, grey beast, like a small dog, only with a smooth patch on the top of its head, that looked bald just where a dog's rough hair would have stood up. He, too, became aware of her and shuffled out of sight, almost before she could make quite sure what she had seen. Jasper would not have frightened them away, she knew: weazel or badger would have gone on with their own concerns, quite undisturbed by his presence. The wild things came to him as to one of themselves; squirrels even and bats would let him hold them in his hand, and she had even known him call the horned owl to him by his weird imitation of its scream. However marvellous it might seem to other people, to her it was not strange: had she not stooped to his lure just as the furred and feathered creatures did?

Presently she looked up; a moving shadow was

crossing one of the bars of sunlight between the trees; the slight, brown figure was coming toward her, his footfall as noiseless over the grass as that of the weazel who had shared her solitude. She rose and went to meet him.

Perhaps, after all, the tension of her waiting had been greater than she knew, for, as she lifted her eyes to his face, they brimmed over and she was fain to hide them against his shoulder. Their greeting was almost silent; she found she could not speak. He drew her down to rest upon the bank again, and sat beside her. After a minute he spoke:

"I bring you sorrow, Phenice? Shall I go away?"

Her hand sought his and clasped it close.

"You shall choose freely," he went on. "Is it to be wandering with me, or home?"

She raised her head and looked into his face. "Where you are is home," she said.

## III.

FROM the window of Phenice's parlour a green vista sloped down between currant bushes and raspberry canes, wallflowers and dusty millers, to the orchard. Very cool and dim and shadowy it looked, for the garden lay on the east side of the house, and here, in the sheltered hollow where the farm nestled, the low trees grew thick, and bushes of elder and syringa flourished. Beyond the orchard gate was another alley under the gnarled apple trees, and along it, in the dappled shade of the May afternoon, walked Phenice, tall and fair, in a lilac-sprinkled white gown with a lilac ribbon round her waist; in her hand she held a spray of crab-apple, and the blossoms from above had drifted down upon her and rested on her hair and dress. Close beside her, like her shadow, moved the lithe, spare figure of the vagabond, in loose, shabby brown clothes, bending toward her and talking earnestly. The warm colour mantled under the sunburn in Phenice's cheek and almost rivalled the apple-blossom in her hand.

At the gate they paused, still talking; then she lifted her face to him, and he, doffing his soft, shapeless felt hat, bent toward her and laid his lips on hers. Then he disappeared under the trees, and she came on up the garden alone. For a minute she was looking down, the drooped brown lashes hiding love's liquid,

dreamy gaze; then she raised her head and encountered four pairs of eyes, astonished, hurt, indignant, staring at her from the glass door of the parlour.

The room was so seldom used that it never occurred to Phenice that she was parting with her lover before an audience. It was not she, however, who was most embarrassed as she stepped over the sill of the door.

The vicar had put on his double eyeglasses the better to observe this rebellious parishioner whom he had come to exhort, and coughed deprecatingly as he took the hand Phenice held out. The vicar's wife stood with face modestly averted from the window, all one blush from the lace frills of her black silk mantle to the parting of her hair. Old Mr. Everard, his spectacles pushed up on his forehead, his white hair rumpled, looked vexed and disturbed; in the background stood Andrew, grim and taciturn, his hand on the back of a chair. Into the midst walked Phenice, as if she had done nothing wrong.

The lady was the first to recover speech.

"After what we have just witnessed I fear we have been misled."

"Not by me, ma'am," said old Mr. Everard. "I believed Mr. Jasper was no longer in the neighbourhood, as I told you. I am as much astonished as you are."

"Then I am afraid there has been something underhand in this sad business. Phenice, I am shocked—grieved—ashamed."

Phenice drew back the welcoming hand she had been about to offer to her visitor, and stood facing them all proudly. "I have nothing to be ashamed

of," she said, "and I don't know by what right an accusation of being underhand should be brought against me. I only accepted Mr. Jasper's offer of marriage this afternoon. My grandfather has not been deceived in the matter; I told him Mr. Jasper would come back for his answer to-day. I have but just given it him."

"In flat disobedience to your grandfather," put in Mrs. Biddlecombe.

"I would fain have had grandfather's consent; I tried to win it; but after all, when all is said and done, a woman must choose for herself."

"Francis," said Mrs. Biddlecombe, "tell Phenice what we came to warn her of."

Mr. Biddlecombe coughed, just as he did when he wanted to fill up a pause in an extempore sermon, and the good lady, unable to contain herself while he cleared his throat, struck in, "The man is an escaped convict."

Perhaps, if she had not hurled her weapon with quite so much vehemence, Phenice might have been struck by it; as it was, the announcement was too dramatic and missed its mark.

"There are always stories," she answered calmly, "about anyone a little out of the common,—especially about a stranger in a country place,—but we have known Mr. Jasper a long while, and we don't pay any heed to them."

"Well, I can only assure you he is the same man that broke out of Dronechester Gaol a few years ago, where he was undergoing penal servitude for the murder of a policeman."

"Manslaughter, my dear. Above all things let us be accurate. Besides, I am not quite sure that it was even as much as that, for I believe the policeman did not die."

"Whether he died or not the intention was the same, so the guilt was the same. And would you consider such a man a fit husband for your granddaughter?" she added, turning to the old man, who looked bewildered and astray. He had so securely counted on Jasper's final disappearance that this new development took him all aback.

"Certainly not, ma'am!" he answered. "I do not so consider him, and I have told the girl to think no more upon him. Not that I knew any harm of the man. It was on account of his unsettled way of life and having no fixed home nor occupation. I'd be loth to believe evil of him."

Then Andrew spoke for the first time, out of the background into which he had withdrawn himself.

"The question, as it seems to me, is what ground have we for supposing that this is the same man who long ago did break out of Dronechester Gaol, after being convicted of an assault upon a policeman. Who says he is the same?"

Phenice looked at her cousin gratefully. He had no love for the tramp, she knew, but he would see justice done.

"My gardener says so," said the vicar. "Timson, you know, who has lived with me eleven years. He says he had it from a man on the borders of the forest, from whom he gets pea-sticks. He spoke of hav-

ing seen this man you call Jasper Waring, and recognised him."

"Then," said Andrew, "why don't they take and put him in prison again?"

"Ay, sure!" put in old Everard. "He'd never run the risk to hang about the country here with his neck in a noose, as you might say."

"They say he is in league with all the gipsies and poachers in the neighbourhood."

"Grandfather," broke in Phenice, "would you take the word of this pea-stick man, who after all these years fancies he sees a likeness in Mr. Jasper to some gipsy, against our own knowledge of him? Why, hasn't he lived here with us over two months, and don't we know him?"

"That's just it," said the old man in his gentle, perplexed way. "I can't think it of Mr. Jasper. Why, he wouldn't shed the blood of a rabbit, let alone a man; me and Andrew often jokes him for his tender-heartedness. 'Tis most like a maid, bold though he is, and has often carried his life in his hand in foreign parts. No, I can't think it of him."

Mrs. Biddlecombe was exasperated at this display of weakness.

"And you would let your granddaughter throw herself away upon a man whose only claim to character is that it makes him sick to shoot a rabbit!"

"No, ma'am, no! Such is not my intention. That is another matter altogether. He may be an innocent man as far as that goes, and yet no fit mate for my girl."

"I should think not indeed! A respectable farmer's granddaughter to marry a tramp!"

"Well, in one sense a tramp he may be since he travels the country afoot, but I happen to know he has a banking account at the Southern Counties United, and though that may not say much as to character, still it does count for something."

The vicar put on a judicial air. "Are you sure of that? He might not improbably make statements that—er—could not be verified."

"Quite sure, sir. My grandson cashed a cheque of his in Dronechester only last week."

"A banking account! That certainly does look as if——"

"To my mind," cried the lady, breaking in without ceremony, "it looks as if he might be a professional burglar, like the one in 'The House on the Marsh,' don't you know. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he was. You remember, Mr. Biddlecombe, when you called in his illness he wouldn't see you, and when I came myself, and found him downstairs, I was greatly perturbed by his want of openness. I consider him a most suspicious character. I warned you at the time, Mr. Everard, of the danger of harbouring such people. You now, I trust, see the folly of indiscriminate charity."

"Still, ma'am, I'd be loth to take a man's character away because he had money in the bank that I couldn't account for."

Old Everard's simplicity annoyed Mrs. Biddlecombe even more than Phenice's contumacy. She began to put on her veil in nervous haste. Phenice

stepped forward and took the pin from her shaking hand with quiet, steady fingers. "Let me," she said.

There was an inherent fair-mindedness in her that made her always able to see from her opponent's point of view almost as clearly as she did from her own. If the case had been someone else's she knew she should give the same advice that Mrs. Biddlecombe was giving, only perhaps not in quite the same way. She was quite conscious that she was flying in the face of ordinary rules of good and prudent behaviour, and she must take the consequences. She looked back to many a little act of kindness shown to the little motherless girl, and felt she could not let her good friend depart in wrath.

"Dear Mrs. Biddlecombe, I know you mean kindly; you have always been so good to me. Forgive me if I cannot see things quite as you do, nor take Timson's word against one I know as I do—him."

Mrs. Biddlecombe pressed her hand, and answered the tone rather than the words.

"My dear, you'll be a wise girl, I am sure, and listen to reason. We will have a quiet little talk by ourselves," with a glance at the three men. "You are excited now." Phenice was perfectly still and calm; it was she herself who was flushed and agitated. "Come on Tuesday to the work-party and stay a little after the others are gone. I have no doubt I shall be able to put things before you in their proper light."

The good lady never could quite rid herself of the conviction that her husband's spiritual functions, es-

pecially the direction of the consciences of his parishioners, rested equally upon her shoulders. It was a thing for which she felt herself specially qualified.

One result the visit had was to incline the two men a little more favourably toward Jasper. They had the strongest repugnance to being dictated to, and an Englishman's love for fair play. Phenice's engagement was still ignored and Jasper kept aloof, but whether she saw him or not they never asked, and they took no steps to prevent it. Apparently they utterly disbelieved the pea-stick man's story.

Hopeless as Phenice felt of any good resulting from another argument with Mrs. Biddlecombe, she went to the work-party as she had promised. She was in a curious condition of mind as she sat beside the window of the vicarage dining-room where the meeting was held, and set strange fancies in with her stitches. The monotonous drone of Mrs. Biddlecombe's voice, reading aloud, passed through her ear, but never reached her brain, nor did the cackle which arose whenever the reading ceased for a minute. Nothing seemed real; neither what was nor what was going to be—if, indeed, anything was going to be. Her mind was absolutely passive. Even Jasper seemed unreal; she had not seen him since the day he came back; she did not even know whether he were still in the neighbourhood; perhaps he was gone, and had taken away with him the dream in which she had been living.

The work-party was over at last, and the little bustle of departure, too, and nothing remained but to roll up

the bundles of work and tie on the workers' names. Phenice helped deftly, but in silence; it was not for her to begin.

The vicar's wife was by far the more nervous of the two; she was flushed and heated with reading aloud in a crowded room for two hours, directly after a midday dinner. She would far rather have retired to her drawing-room, put her feet up, and given herself up to a novel, but her sense of duty was strong. She had hoped, too, to be able to overwhelm her adversary with evidence, but both Timson and the pea-stick man had more or less broken down in the details of their story. Perhaps it might have been another man, and perhaps it was not penal servitude he was undergoing, nor yet manslaughter that he had committed; but at any rate there was something; of that she was firmly resolved. She fidgetted round, arranging and re-arranging the bundles. Then she coughed, settled her brooch, which had come unfastened, and opened fire.

"Well, Phenice, I did hope that you would have sent that man about his business before now; I am sorry to find he is still lurking about."

Phenice was glad to hear it; she looked up without speaking.

"Yes, Timson said he saw him mooning about the downs last evening."

"The downs are as free to him as to us, I suppose," she could not help saying.

This seemed to be a cul-de-sac, so Mrs. Biddlecombe had to start again.

"I can't think, I am sure, what your poor grand-

father was about to take a common tramp into his house; he must be getting childish."

Phenice flared up. "A common tramp!" she exclaimed; "that at any rate he is not; he is no more like a common tramp than—than Mr. Biddlecombe is!"

"Then, what is he, pray?" asked Mrs. Biddlecombe tartly, not altogether flattered by the comparison of her reverend parson to a wandering fiddler.

"I don't know," answered Phenice slowly. Her grandfather's belief that he was "a gentleman born" she would not bring forward; it sounded too like romance. "He is a strange person, I allow, but if he chooses to spend his life travelling and prefers to travel afoot, I don't see why he mayn't please himself; it is an honest life anyway, and a harmless one."

"It is extremely unlikely to be either: it is an idle, vicious life in all probability, and how can you, a respectably brought up girl, dream of going off with a disreputable man who has not even a roof to cover you?"

"It is idle, maybe; I've thought that myself sometimes. But why, because a man chooses to live different to his neighbours and doesn't want to take a house and settle down, should everyone say he is disreputable? He is kind to everybody in trouble; he is generous to the poor; he is true-hearted and simple; surely those are the things that matter, not whether he is just like everybody else."

"Phenice, Phenice! are you crazy? A man who has been in prison!"

"But I don't believe it," said Phenice stoutly; "no more does grandad, though he sides with you in wanting me to give him up. Why, do you think I could have had him in the house all those weeks and nursed him, and not know what sort of man he is?"

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Biddlecombe severely, rising from her seat and blushing as she spoke, "that you are blinded by a feeling you ought to be ashamed to indulge."

"And if I do love him," said Phenice, colouring too, yet speaking with a calm dignity that became her, "I know him better than anybody; who should understand him as well as me?"

"I only hope you may not come to shame through your wicked obstinacy." There was a tone in the speaker's voice that sounded as if she would be better pleased to be found right. "At least I trust your grandfather will insist on a full inquiry into all his antecedents."

"I shall ask Mr. Jasper himself whether he ever was in prison," said Phenice, as she walked proudly away.

But that evening when he sauntered in at the glass door in the dusk, and sat an hour with his head against her knees, she never asked him; it seemed too preposterous.

## IV.

AGAINST Phenice's purpose came up successive squadrons. The very next morning she was busy in the kitchen, rolling pastry, when she heard the unusual sound of wheels and a slow, heavy trot along the hard high-road; then softer, as the vehicle turned into the short elm avenue. The kitchen window was at the side of the house and only commanded a view of the potato patch, the bee-hives, and the black-currant bushes, so she laid down her rolling pin and stepped outside; dusting the flour from her hands as she went along the flagged path. She had a premonition who these early visitors were likely to be, and, as she came round the great straggling elder bush that grew at the corner, she perceived without astonishment Twemlow's trap from Dronechester, bulging with aunts and baskets, pulling up at the front door.

First came her cousin Alma, plumping down off the back seat in a frilly pink blouse; next Aunt Lois, —aunt by courtesy and right of age, though only cousin in reality,—a stiff, angular person with a long upper lip and long white teeth, in a severe, black alpaca gown; she threw the reins to Leander Spreadbury, who came running out, and descended with more deliberation, and lastly the unwieldy bulk of Great-aunt Castleworthy was carefully lowered to the ground. They had brought their knitting baskets and

Aunt Castleworthy's cap-basket, a thing shaped like an enormous pumpkin in wicker-work, and there could be no doubt they had come to spend a long day.

Phenice felt about as well disposed to extend a hospitable welcome to her kinsfolk as a beleaguered city does to the guns that are set up over against it. She read dire purpose in Aunt Castleworthy's heavy deliberation and in the set look of Aunt Lois' upper lip, while inquisitiveness radiated from Alma. She kissed them all dutifully, however, and conducted them upstairs to the best chamber to take off their things.

"Well, my love," said Aunt Castleworthy, bestowing a warm, damp salute on Phenice's cool cheek, "so here we are." A self-evident proposition.

The "So glad to see you," which the hostess dutifully tried to produce, sounded so insincere that she was fain to smother it in the linen closet while she got out clean towels.

"Well, Phenice,"—Lois took up the word,—"you are quite a stranger, I declare. You never come to see us now when you come into town. So aunt said to me last night when we had finished our game of backgammon that, if Twemlow could let us have his trap to-day, the weather being so nice and all, we'd come over."

"Yes, and later on brother George would be getting through with his hay and one thing and another. I always do say May is the season for farm visiting. Howsoever, 'tis specially you I come to see. I always promised poor Ellen I'd do my duty by you."

"Indeed, aunt, I never do come to Dronechester

without going to see you, but truly I haven't been in I don't know when. You wouldn't believe what a lot there is to do about the house, when you are the only woman except the maid. Dan generally does all my errands in the town. You've seen him, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, we've seen Andrew pretty constant, yes." And Lois pursed up her lips.

"Dear me, Dan needn't have given me away to the aunts," sighed Phenice to herself, and then excused herself and slipped away that she might complete her pie-crust and toss up a few trifles in the way of custards and snow, to take off the severe simplicity of the daily dinner. This was quite according to country etiquette, and the visitors meanwhile made themselves at home in the parlour.

Lois sniffed two or three times audibly. "Tobacco!" said she. "Somebody has been smoking here."

"And that's not Dan nor yet uncle," said Alma. "They never sit in here."

"Law bless me!" cried Aunt Castleworthy, "if there isn't poor Sylvia's harp! I never see it out of its green baize before, since the poor dear was took. George couldn't bear sight nor sound of it ever after, for all he was so partial to music."

Phenice tried as long as she could to evade the encounter which she knew was inevitable. She spun out her hospitable cares to unconscionable length, she fluttered in and out of the parlour with a restlessness very unlike her characteristic tranquillity, till dinner time drew on, and a weighty subject was not lightly to be entered on. Then, later, there was Aunt Castle-

worthy's nap, and a visit to the poultry yard with lengthy discussions on incubators and improved hen-coops, but the May afternoons are long; and, despite all her wiles, she found herself at length established in the parlour with some white stitchery in her hands, and her relations sitting round her in a ring, concentrating their attention upon her.

Aunt Castleworthy, as belonged to her age and prerogatives in the family, opened the discussion with one of those vague movements that are more difficult to meet than a direct attack.

"Well, Phenice,"—laying down her knitting and smoothing her gown over her fat knees,—"what's this I hear?"

"I don't know, aunt, I am sure." Phenice bent her head over her seam and set several swift, neat stitches.

"Oh, don't try to put me off. I should have thought that me being your nearest relation, and had your mother in my arms many a time when she was a baby—to say nothing of you, born into a world of sorrow as you was—I should have thought I would have been the first person to be told."

"To be told what?" This circling round the subject irritated Phenice, and she spoke quite sharply.

"Why, that you—a respectably brought up young woman and my own poor brother's grandchild—was wanting to marry a tramping fiddler."

Phenice laid down her work. "You would be told, aunt, the very first if there was anything settled. Grandad likes Mr. Jasper, but he doesn't want me to marry him. I suppose it's no wonder; it is a queer

life. I'm loth to go against him, and him getting so old."

"And you'll be a wise girl and send the fellow about his business?"

Phenice shook her head. "I shall wait and hope," she said.

"Law, Phenie!" cried Louis; "you must be crazed surely. How do you suppose you would like to tramp the country and herd with tinkers and such?"

Phenice stood up, letting her work and her thimble slide unheeded from her lap.

"Like it!" she cried. "Do you suppose I like this narrow, monotonous life; doing the same things day in, day out; seeing no more, knowing no more of the great wide world that lies outside this little cup in the hills till one comes to shut one's eyes and lie down in the churchyard?"

"Gracious me!" said Lois. "Andrew said you were clean daft, and so you must be. Whatever could a reasonable woman want more?"

"Ah!" said Aunt Castleworthy, shaking her head till the tufts of gilt oats in her cap trembled with agitation, "and a reasonable woman who knew how to play her cards might have been safely married to Andrew by this time. You've fooled away your chances, Phenice, I doubt."

"I never wanted to marry Andrew; there's never been the least word of the sort between him and me. We have grown up together like brother and sister. We never thought of it, whatever grandad might have had in his head."

"The more's the pity. You and Andrew and Alma

is all the same kin to me, and 'twould have been share and share alike when I am gone, and you might have had the good of the two shares, but I'm not going to make ducks and drakes with my money."

Phenice picked up her work and seated herself again.

"I'm not looking for your money, Aunt Castleworthy. You'll leave it just as you please, of course. If I don't marry to content my relations, I shan't expect them to trouble about me."

"Ah, you are mighty high, but when you come to beggary we shall hear a different tale, and then it 'll be too late. It beats me how a sensible girl can throw away a good roof over her head, and plenty of good furniture, and things laid by in them presses upstairs as I've gone over with poor Ellen many a time, and go off with a man who has never a roof over his head nor a penny to bless himself with but what he can wheedle out of other folks' pockets."

"Mr. Jasper mayn't have a roof, because he doesn't care to; but as to the pennies, I fancy he has a good many more of those than we have. He has money in the bank, we know, and he told grandad he would take care I should never come to want."

"Law, Phenie!" cried Alma; "then why in the world don't you make him take a nice little house in Dronechester, and you could have new furniture, much smarter than these old sticks. Whatever is the use of getting married if you don't have new things and plenty of nice new clothes? I grant you it would have seemed rather poky to have married old Dan and stick in the same place all your life."

Phenice smiled. "Jasper won't settle down," she said.

"Well, there! I wouldn't give much for a man being fond of me, if I couldn't make him do what I wanted."

"Perhaps I don't want it."

She pictured Jasper in such a little suburban villa as Aunt Castleworthy had retired to when she gave up her farm, with nothing to do but loaf about Dronechester streets.

A shadow darkened the glass door, and Alma jumped with a little affected scream. Phenice, who was sitting with her back to it, turned her head just as the tall, shabby brown figure sauntered in.

"You have friends? I didn't know. Am I disturbing? I won't stay; I only wanted a needle and thread."

"No, come in; I am very glad. This is my Aunt Castleworthy; my cousins, Miss Blake, Miss Alma Blake. Aunt, this is"—she hesitated an instant—"this is Jasper." She knew he disliked being called Mr. Waring.

The bows with which he saluted the three ladies were so unlike anything they had expected from the tramping fiddler that they all three sat staring at him, and could none of them find a word to say.

Phenice began rummaging in her workbox. "A needle and thread you wanted; black, I suppose? What is it for? Can't I do it?"

"No, no, I can manage; it is only a rent. I am not so helpless as not to be able to mend for myself. I should often be in a sorry plight if I were dependent

on women's ministrations," he added with a laugh, looking round. Then, as he met no response but an amazed stare, he seated himself on an ottoman close to the window, and deftly threaded a needle.

While he darned with an intent brow and without a thimble, they sat round and watched him as they might have watched the performance of a chimpanzee at Barnum's; he drawing his long needle in and out the while with the utmost sangfroid.

Phenice's face was a little troubled. "I wish you would let me do it," she said; "I do hate to see a man sew. There!"—as he finished—"now there's a button off your cuff; you can't do that for yourself."

"I give in."

He drew his stool to her knee and laid his arm across her lap, looking at her with a half-quizzical gaze while she stitched with fingers that shook.

"You see you will have to come with me," he said in an undertone, as she broke off her thread.

"Are you going to stop and see grandad? He'll be in at tea-time."

He looked at the visitors. "I think not to-day; I'm an obvious nuisance. I'll be off."

"Oh, do stay!" she whispered despairingly. "I was so thankful when you came in."

"Well, but I seem to have struck you all dumb. Shall we have some music? This silence is like a frost."

He turned to Alma, who was nearest. "Are you fond of music?" he inquired.

Alma giggled. "Oh, I'm very fond of good

music," she said in a patronising tone. "We have a beautiful choral society in Dronechester."

"The idea," said Miss Alma to herself, "of a tramping fiddler thinking we should care to listen to his rubbishy tunes. Law, Phenice!" she exclaimed aloud. "Are you going to play the harp? Well, I never!" as Jasper drew the old harp forward.

She took up her fancy-work again with an ostentatious yawn: she was not going to listen; she did not think she was listening, she had sunk into a dream—a dream of lovely frocks, of moonlight walks home from the choral practices, of dances which were a whirl of delight. Lois Blake's knitting, too, had dropped from her hand, the hard lines round her mouth had relaxed, the long upper lip curled a little in remembrance of old days, of the dear old days when life had seemed to promise something better and richer than dancing attendance on old Aunt Castleworthy and awaiting her share of the Castleworthy savings. Would there ever come a day,—on the other side, perhaps,—when she should find the old dreams again?

The music ceased. Aunt Castleworthy took off her spectacles and wiped them; then she leaned forward with an eagerness unlike her usual lethargic calm:

"Could you play 'Annie Laurie' now? I used to hear it when I was a girl."

"Can you, Phenice?"

She nodded, and they swept on again as though one spirit moved them both. At the end the listeners were eager for more, but the player had vanished; while

Phenice was tuning a string, without farewell, without a word, he had slipped off into the dusk.

"What, is he gone?" said Lois. "Oh, Phenice, I wish you would make him come back and play again. I could listen all night."

"Ah!" sighed Aunt Castleworthy, "that puts me in mind of the music we used to hear in my young days. As to Alma's choral concerts and that, 'tis all a confusion and a hugger-nugger. Give me tunes!"

"I thought he was ugly when he first came in," said Alma musingly, as her feet touched solid earth again, "but I do declare he has the most beautiful eyes and something so romantic about him. When he plays like that—though, of course, it isn't real good music—he makes your flesh quite creep."

And when after tea Twemlow's trap came round, they had quite forgotten to lecture Phenice any more.

## V.

When the May sunshine thawed his old bones Zachary Chalke, who had been head shepherd at Priestlands time out of mind, came out with the other hibernating creatures, and resumed his oversight of the huge flock which was the farm's best wealth. Farmer Everard, with whom old Zack had worked ever since they were both young together, felt easy about the sheep when the experienced eye of the old shepherd was over them, and where activity was needed complete confidence could be reposed in Rake, the stump-tailed sheep-dog, who was hardly less wise than his master. Meanwhile young Zack, whose brains were not his strong point, could bear a hand in the farm labour, where strength and sinew were more needed than sagacity.

In the sheltered hollow of the Devil's Punchbowl a railway carriage of an antiquated pattern was set up that the old man might have a refuge in case of storm, and a place to boil his kettle. In lambing season it served as young Zack's sleeping apartment, but nights out were no longer a necessity, and, when the flock was folded for the night, old Zack took his way across the hills from his solitary camping ground to his no less lonely cottage.

His long, tranquil days were seldom interrupted, but one sunny afternoon he was not alone; a mur-

muring voice might be heard beside him from the leeward of the hut, where a long, brown figure lay crushing the sweetness out of thyme and woodruff, chin propped on elbows which were planted each side of an open volume. The old shepherd sat close by, listening with deep attention; his brown, knobby hands resting on the top of his knobby staff; his blue eyes mechanically following the sheep, as they moved in curving lines over the sloping hillside. The voice went on, a little sing-song, a little drawling, but very sweet:

> "Here, where the world is quiet,
> Here, where all trouble seems
> Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
> In doubtful dreams of dreams——"

"Ay, ay; it be main quiet up here most times, so it be," remarked the old man.

The reader's voice ceased, and the humming of millions of bees, over all the thyme-clad down country, filled the ear like the sound of many waters.

"Goo on, sir, if you please. I didn't goo fur to interrup'."

"No, no, I like to hear you talk."

"Sheep is quiet animals, turble quiet, and there don't many come up along this way without 'tis Parson Wybrow now and again on his old white horse. He do stop for a crack when he see me, else I'd most furgit the use o' my tongue."

"Do you never get sick of the lonesomeness, Zack?" asked Jasper.

"No, sir, no. Old folk do like to be quiet, and when my poor missus was alive I did get clackin'

enough to hum. Women takes good care not to lose the use o' their tongues. 'Tis a woman's best limb, as they say."

Jasper laughed. "In some countries where I have been women are shepherds. What would your missus have said to that? She would have had to talk to the dog."

"Ah, dogs is wonderful good company. Sheep's different; you may know 'em all and like 'em all very well, but they don't have naught to say to you nor you to them. They don't know, bless ye, whether you're sick or well; but Rake, if you are a bit down in the mouth, he'll come and look up in your face and poke his cold nose into your hand and thump wi' his tail as much as to say, 'Why, what's to do wi' you, old feller? Pluck up your heart.'"

Jasper rolled over on his back, looking up into the palpitating blue sky with steady eyes that never blinked.

"Yes, it is a good life," he said presently. "Kings have been willing to change with you before now. There was one, who found his crown a thorny one, who said:

"'O God! methinks it were a happy life
To be no better than a homely swain;
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
And carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes as they run;

. . . . . .

So many minutes, hours, days, months, and years,
Passed over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
Ah, what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!

**Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade**
**To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep,**
**Than doth a rich embroidered canopy**
**To kings that fear their subjects' treachery?**
**Oh, yes! it doth; a thousandfold it doth.**
**And to conclude—the shepherd's homely curds,**
**His cold, thin drink out of his leather bottle,**
**His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,**
**All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,**
**Is far beyond a prince's delicates,**
**His viands sparkling in a golden cup,**
**His body couched on a curious bed,**
**When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him.'"**

"Ah, you don't see none o' them old leather bottles now," remarked Zack. "I minds when I was a little chap my grandfer had one o' they. He warn't no good, but we kep' un as a curiosity like."

"Ah, leather bottles have gone out with many another good thing! As a rule folk don't need to carry their drink with them; few travel afoot, and the public houses are set thicker than they used to be. I should often be glad of one on my long tramps, though. I wish I had brought one with me from the East. There they often carry water across the desert in one, or in a gourd slung on to their camels. A gourd is the coolest, perhaps, but not so easy to carry."

"So you've travelled in them Bible countries. I'd like to hear ye tell about 'em. When I do hear ye talk, it do fairly seem as though I'm there; me that have never set foot the further side of they high hills."

Jasper mused for a minute, then began:

"Well, can you fancy travelling across a wide country, not unlike this in outline, only the hills are flatter,

and instead of being covered with fine turf, all parched and baked to loose sand, so that everything looks tawny as if you saw it through a yellow glass; not a blade of grass anywhere, only stones to break the monotony? Do you know what it is, I wonder, to be really thirsty, so that your tongue feels like a piece of leather too large for your mouth, and the back of your throat is all sore and burning? I remember one such journey. I was riding and had a guide with me. We had carried water in skins behind our saddles, but it had all been used up thirty-six hours before, for we had been caught in an awful sandstorm, and had had to lie for hours in the lee of our horses, with our backs to the wind while it blew over us. Both we and they were parched and exhausted, but we struggled on; of course we did, there was nothing else for it. Now and again a shadow swept over us for an instant; it was a vulture watching to see what sort of fight we should make for our lives.

"We had been plodding doggedly on for hours when I raised my head, and far on before us, where the tawny hue of the desert melted into the amethyst distance I saw palm trees, a whole grove of them, white buildings shimmering between, and a shining level line—water, at last! I raised my arm and pointed.

"'How far?' I said. I could not articulate a needless word.

"My guide looked. 'As far as to Heaven's gate,' he answered.

"I did not believe him, and on we went in silence. There was a great rock just on the hither side of the

trees; that made me so sure; mirage would not have looked so hard and clear. We rode on for nearly an hour till my eyes got so strained with their anxious gaze, trying to make sure we were really getting nearer, that I closed them for an instant, and when I looked again—where was it? There stood the rock, quite near us now, frowning and grim, and at its foot two dark heaps, a large and a small one, but the trees, the houses, above all, the stream—gone. The heaps were a man with an empty gourd beside him, and a horse: the vultures had not yet picked the bones quite clean."

"But you got water?" The old shepherd's eyes were quite strained with eagerness.

"Oh, ay, a few miles further; for here I am, you see, not a penny the worse. After an hour or so more we dragged ourselves into a village; one of the horses died, though. Now what more shall I tell you?"

"About the shepherds out there, and how they do live and work."

"Well, you know, they don't drive their flocks nor use dogs, but walk in front, calling from time to time, and the sheep or goats follow them."

"To be sure; 'tis like that in the Bible: 'My sheep hear my voice. And a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.' I'm thinkin', though, them Bible sheep must be a deal more knowin' than ourn. They must be most as wise as dogs out there. And so they be just the same now as in them old days?"

"Ay; things don't change much in the immemorial East; men any more than sheep. They go on doing

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as their fathers did before them. Still they plough with oxen, and thresh with the flail, and winnow with the fan."

"Ah! 'taint so long ago as the life of an old man like me they used to do it all in the old ways here. I minds threshin' on the granary floor when I was a lad. It took every hand on the farm, and there was a many more in them days. We'd use to have the space measured out keerful, fur the swing of a man from the waist with the flail in's hand had a turble long reach."

"Were there ever accidents?"

"Not as ever I heard tell on; the beats was so even as music; a man was bound to get into 'em steady. Ah, 'twas a fine sight! I minds it well of a summer afternoon; the sun shinin' in slantways through the door and the dust dancin' in it like motes o' gold, and through the haze the row of young fellers. With their sleeves rolled up to the shoulder and their shirts open to the waist, the muscles on 'em standin' out like whip-cord; swingin' back and comin' down with a thud, like as if one rope pulled 'em all. And when we stopped to rest, didn't the sweat roll off our foreheads just about!"

"The work is easier now, eh?"

"Mebbe; it wants a differnt kind o' trainin'. 'Tis mucky work feedin' them engines, and when there is a accident 'tis a bad 'un. Ah, I've lived on a farm for many a long year now, and watched the ways on it year in, year out, and I've heerd a deal about improvement and progress and what not, and I do read the papers now and agen wi' all their big talk about

the agricultural labourer—but where is he now? I arsts you. The young fellers do all goo off to the town for to better theirselves. They don't better the country, bless ye, wi' all their new ways; the land's got poor, and the farmers is got poor. The money goos for what they calls 'igh farmin'; but when is it coming back, I'd like to know."

"So you don't believe in progress, Zack? Isn't the world going faster than ever it went?"

"P'r'aps it is; but there is such a thing as runnin' fast along the wrong road; and then the faster you runs, the further off you gets."

Jasper laughed softly. "My friend," he said, "John Ruskin would have liked you."

"And who may he be? I don't mind as ever I heerd tell on him; he's not from these parts, I'm thinkin'."

"No, not from these parts, but much of your way of thinking on many things. He, too, thought feeding engines mucky work, and held that it was true still that by the sweat of his brow man should eat bread. He believed that haste to be rich tended to poverty, and that the love of money was the root of all evil."

"Ah, him and me'd be good friends," said Zack.

"Well, but, Zack, what do you make of the fact that wages are much higher now than in the days you look back to so fondly?"

"What do *you* make of it? You aint one that thinks overmuch of money."

"Perhaps not, but I want your ideas."

"True, the money is more, I'll allow, but then the

good of money is what you can get wi' it. You did use to have a cottage rent-free, and half a porker Christmas time, and your leasin' cakes, and many a little thing allowed, but you gets none o' all that now. Nowadays 'tis, 'Well, you've got your money you stuck out for; take it, and do the best you can wi' it.' And many in these parts has a job to find where to lay their heads. Why, I do assure you, many of the farmers has them sweepers at the harvest that there mayn't be an ear left for the gleaners."

"Not Farmer Everard?"

"No, sir, no; for myself I don't complain; the master's been main good to me. I only wish he prospered better'n what he do. I minds his father with money in the bank and a fine hunter to ride. If the master pays his way, it's about as much as he do."

Jasper propped his chin on his hand and looked at the old man.

"Looking back on your seventy years, Zack, can you say it has been a good life?"

Zachary nodded. "I've had my ups and downs like the rest of us," he said; "but I thank the Lord I've had a happy life. That there king was right; there's a deal o' pleasantness in a shepherd's life for them that aren't always settin' their minds on something different to what they got. Look at the summer mornings; there! I couldn't tell ye how joyful it do seem with the sun making all the world to glitter, and the larks singin'—why the air'd be all in a charm wi' 'em. In winter there's hard bits now and agen, but 'tis main snug of a snowy night to come into the hut

wi' a good fire and set close anigh un. Ah, 'tis then you gets the good of a nice book! If I'd to live my life over again, I'd not choose no other."

How many of those down below, in the city in the hollow, in the thick of the race for wealth, when they get to their journey's end would say the same?

Jasper drew up his long limbs from his thymy couch and strolled away; it never was his habit to make elaborate greetings nor leave-takings; when he had said his say, he went his way. As his long, gaunt shadow stalked after him over the brim of the punch-bowl, another shadow came softly wavering down the slope on the other side: the old shepherd was favoured to-day in the article of visitors.

It was Phenice, carrying a basket, who drew near.

"I have brought you some of my lardy cakes, Zack, that you are so fond of; and I want to talk to you."

She sat down just where Jasper had hollowed the cushions of bedstraw and ladies' fingers, and took the cakes out of the clean napkin in which they were daintily folded. Though she had said she came to talk she did not speak when she had laid her little offering beside him, but sat making up the yellow blossoms into miniature nosegays. Zack was the first to break the silence.

"Well, missie, what do you think o' me havin' a visitor to set long o' me all the afternoon; tellin' such tales as never was, and readin' beautiful. And there lays his book, as he left behind him."

She picked it up and turned a page or two, and her eyes smiled. Who but Jasper would dream of read-

ing Swinburne's "Garden of Proserpine" to an old shepherd?

"And did you like it, Zack?"

"Oh, ay; I liked it fine. Mr. Jasper, he do read as if he was actin' of it all out; seems most as if you was there."

Phenice, with her eyes still on the book, went on fluttering the pages as though seeking something.

"Zack, you have lived a long time in the world, and I think you have learned wisdom. Tell me what you think."

"What I think of what, missie?"

"What you think of Mr. Jasper. Would you trust him?"

"Ah, missie, that there is a hard question: It all depends on what you mean by trust him. Would I believe any harm of him? No, that I wouldn't; but if I had a little maid of my own and he wanted her, would I let him have her? No, that I wouldn't again."

"Why not?"

"Because, missie, for all his kindly ways, and the gentle look in his eyes, he would forget her. He'll never make a home fit to bring a wife to. A woman wants a man as 'll work for her and bring her his money Saturday nights. Mr. Jasper, he may be a gentleman born, for aught I can tell; I half believe he is. But he has got a gipsy heart, he's an idler and a rover, and he'll never be no other. No woman couldn't hold him."

"Ah, well, perhaps you are right. Good-night, Zack."

# *BOOK III.*

## A HUNTED MAN.

I can believe it shall you grieve,
  And somewhat you distraine:
But afterward your painës hard
  Within a day or twaine
Shall soon aslake, and ye shall take,
  Comfort to you againe.

. . . . .

If ye goe thydre ye must considre
  Whan ye have lust to dine,
There shall no mete be for to get
  Neither bere, ale, ne wine;
Ne shetës clene, to lie betwene,
  Made of thread and twine;
None other house but leves and boughes,
  To cover your head and mine.
Lo, mine herte swete, this ill diete
  Should make you pale and wan;
Wherefore I'll to the green-wood goe,
  Alone, a banished man.

—*Ballad of the Nut-browne Mayde.*

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With "Here's the Fiddler of Dooney!"
And dance like a wave of the sea.

—*W. B. Yeats.*

## I.

"It is no use, Phenice; you must either come or stay. Either you have the courage to break with all the old, ordered life you know and follow me into the wilderness, or else——"

"Else what?"

"Why, give me a last kiss, and we'll say good-bye."

She looked at him dumbly.

"They say I beguile you, I bewitch you. On the contrary, I want to put everything fair and square before you: you shall not say I deceived you with false promises. Your people propose that I should get work, take a cottage, and settle down. Is it likely?" He lay back on the grass with his hat tilted over his eyes, and laughed softly. "You might as well propose to a squirrel to get work and take a cottage. If you are waiting for me to do any such thing, you are deceiving yourself. If you come with me, you must wander as I wander."

"I know it, and I wish no other, but——"

"But what? You have not the courage? Your cheeks are pale, your eyelids are red, you have not slept all night. You daren't trust yourself to me?"

She plucked nervously at the daisies in the grass beside her.

"Mrs. Biddlecombe was talking to me," she began.

He raised himself on his elbow. "Mrs. Biddlecombe? What, that prying person who came catechising me the first day I got downstairs, and offered to put me in the way of earning an honest livelihood?" She nodded. "Well, Phenice, if you are not sure you care enough for me to come with me without consulting all the Mrs. Biddlecombes of your acquaintance—why, then——"

"Oh, no, no!" she broke in. "I was not consulting her; I should not dream of it. It was only—she was saying such things of you. Of course I did not believe her for an instant, only I did want to know how to contradict."

"What things?"

"That you had broken out of Dronechester Gaol."

He drew himself up into a sitting posture and clasped his hands round his knees, while his eyes travelled across the valley to a hill above the city, where the county prison reared its ugly head. He shivered.

Phenice watched him without a word. She grew cold, and her breath almost failed her before he spoke.

"Ah, what a night it was!" he said with a long breath. "It seems like a dream as I look back to it, and it was so long ago. You don't mean they are hunting me still? They never seemed very keen about catching me. I suppose I was rather mad to come into this part of the world again, but I thought it had passed from everyone's recollection. Well, all the more reason for not hanging about here longer than I can help."

"But it isn't true!" gasped Phenice. "You can't mean it was true?"

He brought his eyes back again to her dismayed face.

"True? Ay! Does it make me a different man to what I was last week when you put your hand in mine and said: 'I'd follow you to the world's end'?"

"Tell me about it," she said.

He shivered again. "If you will. It is like an ugly nightmare. The hideous high walls closing one in; the hideous, clean, whitewashed corridors leading nowhere; the sordid, aimless taskwork day after day with gangs of squalid fellows all alike; and then another nightmare, foggier still in my remembrance, when I lay all day and all night at the bottom of a deep, square pit, with nothing in it but the bed I lay on, a table with a pitcher of water on it, and a chair. High up, far out of reach, a small square of sky crossed with bars; sometimes it was blue, and sometimes clouds drifted over it, and that was all the change I got. I used to watch the patch of sunshine travelling across the wall and long that it might reach me, but it never did. They talk of solitude driving a man mad. If it had been solitude, I could have borne it. It was the sense of being watched, of an eye at the judas any time, that would have driven me mad soon. Then came the chaplain and the doctor, prying, questioning, advising, and I got desperate."

"You fell ill, then?"

"I suppose so. It must have been a touch of malarial fever, for it came and went. I had had something of the sort once in Naples, but I never lay up for it. It was the being shut up; it would have gone off fast enough, if they would have given me air in-

stead of physic. Some days I would wake quite well, but by afternoon it was on me again. Well, one day, as I lay watching my scrap of sky, a butterfly came fluttering in by mistake, one of the yellow sort that bring word that spring is come, and I knew the cuckoos were shouting in all the coppices round. God! And they must call for another spring before ever I should hear them again. My little visitor flickered about a bit and then out again, as who should say, 'I don't care for your quarters, my friend. Why don't you come out?' Well, why not? I would have a try for it, any way."

"You got out?" cried Phenice. "However did you manage it?"

"Ay, I got out, thank God! I only wonder I had not before, but I suppose I was too down-hearted. I don't know the fence or the wall that will keep me the wrong side of it long. I once picked up a few useful tricks from some acrobats I travelled with for awhile, and those and my gipsy bones helped me to do several things which, after I had done them, the authorities swore were quite impossible."

"Gipsy bones? What do you mean? Are you a gipsy, then?" asked Phenice.

"Ah, that's another story. But as to the bones, feel that." He stretched out his lean, brown hand. "Squeeze it up as hard as ever you can."

It looked broad across the knuckles, but yielded to Phenice's firm grip as though it were made of gristle instead of bone, like the hand of a Hindu.

"I am like that all over," he said, "and it is thanks to that, and my narrow head, that I squeezed through

an aperture that they said, when it was measured afterwards, would not have let the body of a ten-year-old child through. The toughest part was the wrenching the bars a bit apart, with only my knee on the ledge to rest on, for the window was so high up I could only reach it by a spring from the table. The first wall was easy, for I dropped on to a bit of roof which overtopped it, and was able to crawl along the ridge and slide down a pipe into the outer quadrangle, but there was another in front of me, and how was I to get over that unless I could crawl up it on my toes and finger-nails? Luck favoured me. The warders had their quarters along one side of this outer square, and the wife of one of them had left her wash hanging in her little front garden, for the night was warm and dry, and one end of the line was fastened to an unusually long clothes-prop. This should serve me as a ladder. While I was uprooting it I heard the warder on duty coming his round, and had just time to wrap it and myself together in the nearest sheet while he went by. If he noticed any movement, no doubt he thought it was the wet linen flapping round the post in the wind.

"Shall I ever forget what I felt when, sliding down the pole, my feet touched the gritty road outside the wall, and I heard the measured tramp, just the other side, passing the spot where I had mounted! I held my breath, but the step went on, steady, unbroken; he could have heard nothing.

"I was out now on a straight country road: behind me lay Dronechester, wrapped in slumber, before me the downs and the forest. I knew my bearings pretty

well, for, though I had never been on that road before except in Black Maria, I was familiar with the lay of the land, and for the forest I headed straight.

"Not many yards beyond the prison stood a terrace of little houses, each with its bow-window and scrap of flower-bed in front. 'Inside,' quoth I to myself, 'should be clothes; and clothes I must assuredly have.' A sheet was all very well at starting and might have enabled me to assume the part of ghost at a moment's notice, in case of meeting any belated wayfarers, but obviously I could not travel far in it. Talk of escaping by the skin of your teeth! I had had to leave even my shirt behind, for I was forced to take a lesson from Michal, the wife of David, and array my bolster in it with its striped sleeve over its imaginary eyes, to delude the warder when he came to take his perfunctory peep through the judas. Since I was sick my clothes had been taken away, and perhaps it was as well; I don't believe I could have slipped through the bars in them.

"In some of the windows were cards: 'Apartments,' 'Milliner and Dressmaker,' 'Mangling done here.' No good to me: I shouldn't be much better off in a shawl or a woman's waterproof, and besides, I did not want to terrify a lone woman. At No. 5 'Job Waiter' was in the window, and I turned in and examined window and door. There isn't much more strength in these little jerry-built places than in a bandbox, and a strong lift brought the door clean off its hinges."

"Oh!" cried Phenice; "you broke in!"

"Well, my dear, what would you have done? To

ring the bell and ask politely for the loan of a suit of clothes meant an immediate return to captivity; to go on as I was would most likely land me in a madhouse. By the good old rule of doing as you would be done by I was all right, for I would certainly far rather a chap took my clothes without my leave than got back into gaol, even if he deserved it. Well, to resume: To my disappointment there were no great-coats in the passage, but these sort of people have a funny habit of leaving their best clothes folded on a chair in the front parlour, and there accordingly I found them. Certainly the last costume I should have picked would have been a dress-suit with a dickey and a top-hat, but beggars mustn't be choosers, and I was fain to put them on. As I was struggling into them—they were an uncommon poor fit—I heard sounds from above that showed me I was heard, though the good folks seemed too frightened to come down and look for me. However, they might pluck up their courage, so I did not linger to search for food, hungry though I was, but slipped out again, seeing no one but a large grey parrot, who brought my heart into my mouth by suddenly speaking in my ear, but who, I felt, must have a fellow-feeling for me, for he was shaking the bars of his cage as I had shaken mine. I had half a mind to open it for him, but what could he have done for himself in a strange land?"

"What a queer fellow you are, Jasper, to think about the parrot at such a minute."

"Am I? Why, there wasn't a creature breathing to whom I would not have given freedom, if I could,

that blessed night. Think what it was to me, Phenice, after those four bare walls stinking of white-wash and chloride of lime, to have the fragrant night all round me; the great wide sky, after for months seeing but a hand's breadth of it; the soft wind rushing to meet me; the myriad, myriad stars, for there wasn't even a cloud to shut me in; and far ahead of me the forest, where, could I only reach it, I should find friends and shelter. The scent of a bean-field the other side of the hedge sent me nearly mad with joy.

"Well, I tramped on mile after mile, and then a misgiving came over me that I should not be able to do it, after all. It is no hardship to me as a rule to travel barefoot, but after some months' inaction and some weeks in bed nature's hard leather had gone soft, and soon my feet began to bleed. Besides, the reaction after the violent exertion and the want of food made me feel as if I could not keep on. If they discovered my escape early, and set off in pursuit, I should be overtaken yet. Presently I came to one of those delightful old wayside inns that linger still on country roads. Here, I felt sure, would be provisions, but I must help myself. This is the part you don't like, I know, but what would you? I felt sure the landlord would not grudge me the food, but, risk to myself apart, it was far better for him I should take it than ask for it, and so make him connive at my escape."

"I wish you had not had to do it, though," said Phenice uneasily.

"So do I, my dear, but 'needs must when the devil drives.' So I made my way round to the larder.

I can smell now the delicious scent of the tufts of woodruff and sweet alison that I trampled over in the starlight, getting round to the back. It was very simple; I had only to wrench away the nails that held a sheet of perforated zinc, and feel about. The only thing within reach of my long arm happened to be a gooseberry tart, and I polished off the whole of it. How those first green gooseberries did taste of the spring!

"Queer as the meal was, it set me up for a bit, but I limped more and more. Oh, for a horse turned out to grass! And there at last was one. I espied him in a field beside the road, standing milkwhite in the rays of the rising moon; his chin meditatively resting on the top-bar of a gate, as though waiting for me. As I opened the gate he tossed his head and moved off a bit, but when I whistled softly to him and chucked, as the gipsies do, he came whinnying and nuzzling up to me, as if he thought I had a bit of sugar for him. He had a rope halter on, and I stayed for neither saddle nor bridle, but was across his back in a trice. He jumped about a bit at that, but I pressed my knees into his sides, he laid back his ears, and we were off like the wind.

"Ah, what a ride it was! With the rush of the free wind in my face, and the peltering thud of his hoofs as they tore up the grassy track over the downs, for I kept from the high-road as far as I could. On and on, over wide bare spaces of down, anon through dreaming villages which I could not always avoid, clattering through narrow streets, making the sparks fly from the flint. Now and again I would catch a

glimpse of a startled face looking out, as a hand drew aside a window-curtain for an instant, but no one attempted to stay me—as how should they? I was out of their ken by the time they could have reached the door. The last hamlet I passed through showed signs of life. A woman came to her door, carrying a pail. 'Mercy on us!' she cried; 'whatever is the matter?' and stood shading her eyes with her hand till I was out of sight. Just beyond a shepherd, followed by his dog, was crossing a stile. He paused, one leg each side, and eyed me, then called out, 'Hullo, mister! be'est gooin' fur doctor? Fust turn to the left past the chalk-pit.' I thanked him over my shoulder, and did not contradict. That fortunate delusion I owed no doubt to my top-hat and dress clothes. However, it began to be evident that to ride through broad daylight in that rig would be dangerous; moreover, my horse was nearly done.

"When the sun rose I drew rein upon a high moorland, sloping down on one hand to woods and thickets; I was in familiar country now, and soon I might find friends. Anyway, my poor beast could go no more. I slipped from his back, and he stood drooping, trembling in every limb, and all in a lather of sweat. He had done his best for me and I was grateful, but we must part. I kissed his nose. 'You have done me good service,' I said, 'and now I must turn you adrift, which seems brutal, but I can't help it. You know your way back, don't you?'

"So I turned him round, gave him a slap on his side, and trudged on.

## II.

"WELL, the first and perhaps the hardest part of my adventure lay behind me, but I had a good deal to do yet before I could draw an easy breath. I verily believe I would have killed myself sooner than they should clap me in prison again. To get away was one thing, to hide was another; and to hide I must first find, and for that I had to tramp a good bit yet. It may seem that to seek for any particular gipsy in all the length and breadth of that great forest is like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, but anyone so familiar with their ways and haunts as I had been knows pretty well in which bottom each tribe makes its encampment at certain seasons of the year, and I felt tolerably sure of the nook where I should find the Stanleys' tent. For it was not every gipsy who would serve my turn. I wanted someone true enough to hide me and sharp enough to help me.

"What with rangers and cheap trippers the forest is not much of a sanctuary nowadays, and I had to dodge about considerably, so the sun was high by the time I came in sight of the little old black tent I knew, and saw Pamela Stanley's tall figure and yellow-kerchiefed head stooping to gather sticks. There was another woman near, so I did not go forward, but whistled—you know my whistle, and so did she. I saw by the motion of her head she heard me, but she

never looked round. 'Hark! what was that?' said the other. 'A corncrake; one kept me awake half the night,' said Pamela. I slunk back into a thicket of holly and honeysuckle and lay close.

"In a minute or two Pamela came and drew aside the curtain of long suckers that hid my lair. 'I thought you'd come,' she said. 'Directly we heard you was in quod I says to Humphrey, "Jasper 'll come here so soon as ever he can get out." But we must keep you close. Don't you trust no one. There'll be a price on your head soon, and there's those—gipsies, even—who'd sell their own mother for oof.' 'I knew who I could trust,' I said. She made me come inside the tent and lie down, and she gave me a drink and covered me with an old sack, for I was fairly beat, and I slept all day.

"With the dusk I crept out and we had some conversation. Her husband, she said, was away at a pony fair in another county, and till he came back she could hardly arrange for my escape, though she had some ideas toward it and she and Humphrey had talked it over already. Meanwhile she could keep me hidden. It was the easier as she had a decidedly unsociable reputation among the other gipsies, and her kid was too young to talk. For nearly a week I lay close in the thicket behind her tent, and all one afternoon I spent underneath a pile of brushwood. Sometimes of an evening, when I crept out, she would bring me word of the hunt that was up after me, but I had doubled so that they had overshot my traces and were now looking for me westward. All sorts of tales were rife—that I had been caught—missed—caught again.

Somehow I don't fancy they can have been very keen in pursuit, or they must have run me to earth sooner, but they were bound to make a show.

"At last Humphrey came, quite expecting to find me. Hearing I was out, he had already tramped down to Greathampton to see what could be arranged for me, and brought word of a Normandy fruit vessel whose master he used to supply with baskets, which would lie to at the mouth of Bewdley Water, not the next night, but the one after, soon after dark, if I and a cargo of baskets could be got out to her. Humphrey had a cousin who owned a ramshackle old boat, in which we must make shift to reach her.

"'Then I must leave you to-night,' said I, 'for I must fetch my fiddle. God grant they have not cut down to it yet!' Wherever do you think I had left it, Phenie?"

"Where?"

"Why, at the very bottom of a hayrick, as deep into the middle as I could cut. I had been sleeping there snug and close the chilly autumn night that I got into the scrape, and I buried it, thinking I might want the use of both my hands, but little dreaming I should have to leave it so long. I had had the sense, though, to choose the rick they would begin upon last.

"Humphrey swore at me for an idiot, and Pamela looked dismayed. 'You'll be took as sure as fate,' she said. 'Why, my good souls, without my fiddle how am I to earn my bread and cheese?' quoth I; 'besides I am sick for the want of it all these months. Why, I'd sooner leave my wife, if I had one, hidden

in hayrick while I travelled in foreign parts, than the comrade of all my wanderings?'

"I believe you would," said Phenice drily.

He stretched out his hand to her. "I hadn't one, then, you know.

"'Blue blazes, man!' cried Humphrey, 'what's a fiddle in comparison with a man's freedom? You can pick up a fiddle for a few bob over there—if so be as you get safe over.'

"'Not such as mine. I wouldn't take hundreds of pounds for it. Is it not my own, my treasure? Why, Pamela, if one were to say to you, "Never mind the kid; it is heavy. Pitch it in the river; you can easily get another," would you do it? And kids are commoner than fiddles.'

"Pamela rose from beside the fire, and knotted the shawl in which she carried her baby more securely round her. 'Make your mind easy, brother,' she said, 'I am going to fetch your fiddle.'

"'You'll never do it in the time,' said Humphrey laconically.

"'I will; I'll be there by morning, and if you and Jasper will be by the jetty below Loker's pool just after dark, he shall have his fiddle right enough.'

"'You're a trump,' said I. 'You'd better take the moke,' said he, 'if so be as you're bent on going.'

"In ten minutes she was off, and I soon after her, for it would not have been safe for me to attempt to cross the forest in broad daylight; I should have been certain to stumble on some one or other of the people on the lookout for me, so my best chance was to travel by night, keeping to the tracks by thicket and swamp

that only the gipsies know, and creep to cover as soon as it was light. By Pamela's advice I was still wearing the dress-clothes in which I looked like a superannuated scare-crow; certainly the less I was seen the better. So all that day I lay in hiding down by a little weedy pond which, by the untrodden grass and fool's parsley that walled it round, I could see was seldom visited. I had waded to it along the bed of a stream, so I left no track.

"What a long day it was, to be sure! With nothing to do but watch the dab-chicks popping in and out of the banks, and try to reckon time by the shifting shadows and my own sensations of hunger and weariness. Pamela had provided me with some cold meat and bread, but I dared not eat as much as I would lest I might not get off that night, and should come to worse need. Somehow I did not feel very hopeful about getting away. At last the glint of sunshine beyond the dark-shadowed branches that walled in my prison vanished. I waited yet a little till I could no longer make out the forms of the bushes on the other side of the pond, and the squeakings of the dab-chicks had settled into silence; then I crept out of my lair and, hastening to gain the open road across the moor by the time night fell, made the best of my way to Bewdley Water.

"The place Pamela had appointed to meet me was a mile or so above the mouth of the creek. A rotten, little-used jetty straddled across the mud to the channel, and close to it was moored a broad, clumsy boat that belonged to a pal of Humphrey's who used to let it out for duck-shooting. It had been arranged that

either this man or Humphrey himself should be there with a cargo of baskets, under cover of which we hoped to slip off to the fruit vessel, which had promised to lie to somewhere just off the creek.

"The night was pitch-dark; good in some ways for my enterprise, but precious awkward to find out where one had got to. Everything seemed muffled as it were in black velvet and, though my eyes are as good as a cat's in the dark, even I could scarcely distinguish land from water. There was a kind of shine against which I could see or fancy the thick black posts, and I could hear the water lapping against them, but where under heaven was the boat? I whistled softly, but there was no response, and moreover, there was a feeling of intense loneliness. I was certain there was no one there. I don't think I could be near a living being and not know it by a sense more subtle than sound or sight.

"I waded down through the mud and felt about, but the boat I could neither feel nor see. The tide was half high, and by that I knew that I was much later than I meant to be. Lurking and watching as I had had to one makes but slow progress. I crept up the bank again and stumbled against something just under the hollow of it. The baskets! Then Humphrey had been here already. Could he have given me up and gone? Well, whether or no, I was not going without my fiddle.

"I went a bit up the road; Pamela must come that way, and if I was late she was later. Beyond the fork of the lane I dared not venture, lest we might miss. I came back and sat on a bridge that crossed a little

tributary stream, and I must have dropped asleep from sheer weariness instead of watching as I fancied myself doing, for I thought I was galloping in a cavalry charge when I recognised the cantering step of Pamela's valiant donkey, and its rough, hairy side brushed against me on the narrow bridge. I sprang to my feet and snatched at the bridle in the dark. The donkey kicked out, and Pamela fetched me a stinging box on the ear.

"'Hold hard!' I cried. "It is I, Jasper.'

"She slid from the saddle. 'I am sorry,' said she, 'but however come you here? I thought to find you at the jetty, if I wasn't too late. Here's the fiddle. They had cut in pretty deep. A few more days, and they must have found it. Where's Humphrey?'

"'Heaven knows!' said I; 'I doubt the plan has gone wrong.' Yet, as I took my treasure from her, I felt that life yet held comfort.

"'Hark!' She laid her hand upon my arm, and we both heard the sound of bare feet padding across the mud and up the road. In another minute Humphrey had reached us.

"'It is no go,' he panted under his breath. 'It is well you were late, or you'd have been took. The coast-guard are on the lookout. I took the boat and managed to signal to the *Marie-Thérèse* it was no use her waiting, so she's gone and won't be in again for another fortnight. Perhaps by that time the watch may have slackened, and in the meanwhile there is nothing for it but for you to lie low. They overhauled me and my baskets, but they didn't find much. Now what will you do?'

"Ah, what indeed! I was silent.

"'Come back with us,' said Pamela; 'we'll hide you yet.'

"I shook my head. 'Too risky; they'll be scouring the forest now. No, I'll tramp northward for a bit, and do the strolling fiddler till it is safe to come back and have one more try for France and freedom.'

"There was little time for thanks or farewells. I parted with my best friends hurriedly in the dark, and tramped away through the night.

## III.

"WELL, I have been an unconscionable time telling my tale, and there's more yet. Aren't you out of patience, Phenice?"

"No, no; go on!"

"Well, I need not dwell on each day's shifts and lurking places. When I dared I fiddled a bit and scraped up a few coppers, but I had to do it precious badly, as I was still keeping up my rôle of broken-down scarecrow, and I felt it would not sort with the character to play too well. Besides, pity extracted more halfpence from the good-hearted folks than the best of playing would have done—and this time you'll own I had some excuse for begging?" He interrupted his narrative with a quizzical look at her.

"Well, yes; I suppose so," she admitted; "though I never do like the notion of your taking people's coppers—you with money in the bank."

"You know I don't look at it quite that way. When I have I give, and when I need I take. I'm not sure I am not actually doing them a kindness. Nobody enjoys the luxury of giving more than your day-labourer who lives from hand to mouth. If I never get the chance of repaying, I just hand it on to the next poor beggar down on his luck."

Phenice thought of Mrs. Biddlecombe and the immorality of giving. What would she have said!

"You certainly have odd ways of looking at things. Well, go on."

"Anyway I was bound to live, or so it seemed to me at the moment; and as to my money in the bank, it might as well have been at the bottom of the sea for any use I could get of it then, so I scraped along on charity—and it wasn't quite the fat of the land—till the weather played me an ill turn, and we got three or four days of the very worst rain ever I saw in England. There had been a wet day or two while I was in the forest, but I want no snugger shelter than a gipsy tent; now, on the open road, with nothing but a hedge to lurk under, and those miserable dress-clothes, reduced to rags, sopping up the rain like a sponge, I was in a sorry plight. Even when I had a few coppers I durst not venture into an ale-house, for I did not trust that disguise of mine. It was well enough fiddling in the village street in the gathering dusk and made me look more pitiful, but it would not bear investigation at close quarters.

"Toward the end of the second wet day I found myself, dripping from every point of my draggled rags, on the outskirts of a big village I had just passed through. I had a few halfpence about me and might very likely have picked up a few more; hearts open easily in such weather; but I was at my wit's end for a night's lodging. It was a more important looking place than any I had ventured into yet and, if the inhabitants read the papers, they might be aware that a suspicious-looking character was wanted.

"I had stopped under a stone wall to light my pipe, but there was too much wind, so I lifted my head to

see where I could get into the lew for a minute. Just in front of me was a rusty iron gate, imposing enough in its day, with a wrought scroll-work of griffins along the top and great stone balls on each gate-post; but now the lock was broken and tied together with a bit of string, and the nettles had grown up through the bars at the foot. Inside was a board with the inscription, 'To be Let or Sold,' leaning so very much awry I judged it had been there some time. 'Apply to Mr. Oswald, Church Cottages,' was underneath in italics. I thought I would go over it—without an order to view. Possibly it might suit my requirements for a short while. A knife soon admitted me, but, wet though the grass was, I stopped to carefully rearrange the nettles, as I did not want it to be noticed that anyone had gone in.

"I walked up a flagged path on which the rain stood in pools, and found myself in front of a stately Tudor house with grey gables and mullioned windows overlooking a moss-grown terrace, from which flights of stone steps led down to rank beds of nettles and fool's parsley. At each end statues wept green tears over the desolation, and great stone vases, set at intervals on the low parapet, held nothing but toadflax and creeping Jenny. Roses, half-wild again, trailed their long, unpruned suckers across the weedy paths, but their sweetness, and even that of the mock-orange, was nearly stifled by the heavy, dank smell of the wet elder bush that stood at the corner. I pushed my way past it, but back door as well as front was, as I expected, locked. I effected an entry, however, by a low window, and found myself in possession of a spacious

domain, rich with priceless rubbish in the way of splinters of wood and old broken boxes, which furnished me many a good fire. There was a sack of potatoes too in the cellar, and a few battered pots and pans on the ash-pit—I see you looking reproachfully at me, Phenie. Will it make you happier to know that I did really send the value of those potatoes afterward to Mr. Oswald, Church Cottages? Well, to resume: I hardly know how many days I led this Robinson Crusoe life. I used to lie all day drowsing by the warm ashes,—I couldn't keep up a fire till after dark, for fear of the smoke betraying me,—and listen, hour after hour, to the rain dripping from the gutters and the starlings chattering in the eaves, and wonder if I should ever get away. It seemed to have gone on for ages; I suppose it may have been about the third day; I had been dozing on a window seat upstairs, and woke to find the house resonant with noise, slamming doors, pattering feet, shrieks, and sudden bursts of childish laughter.

"My first dreamy idea was that the children who used to inhabit these ancient walls had come back to hold revel there. Then I sat up, rubbed my eyes, and slipped noiselessly with my shoeless feet to the head of the stairs and peered cautiously over the banisters. In the square hall below a party of some six or eight boys and girls were gathered, and seemed to be planning a game of hide-and-seek, for the girls were being chaffed about being afraid to hide alone. Then I overheard an ecstatic exclamation. 'Isn't it a jolly lark! Fancy finding the window open!' Then an older child: 'But it was very careless of old Ozzy.

Father would be vexed.' 'Don't tell, though, or he won't do it again. Now, who'll hide first?'

"I crept back into a distant, gloomy room at the end of an eerie passage full of shadows where the heavy roof beams crossed it; thinking that, if the children were superstitious, they would hardly have the courage to peep in there. I heard the hunt go up and down for a long hour; the screamings, the chasings, the catchings, now nearer, now farther away, till at last the dusk fell and the sounds had almost died into silence. I was just about to come out when I heard a solitary step come pattering down the passage. I stepped back into the room, and even into the depths of a long closet that ran down one side of the wall, but before I could pull the door to after me, a small hand grabbed my coat-sleeve and a shrill, childish voice cried, 'Ah, I've got you! You thought I'd be afraid to look in here.' Then, almost before the words were out of her mouth, she dropped, a tumbled heap of brown holland and light curls, right on my foot. I was every bit as much frightened at her as she was at me. I didn't know what on earth to do. She might have fainted; worse still for me, she might start screaming and bring the whole posse. One child might perhaps be dealt with, but, if the lot came trooping in, I was lost.

"She had covered eyes and ears with her two arms; no doubt she took me for a ghost, and was resolved not to see me. I stooped down and spoke in as coaxing a voice as I knew how. 'It is all right,' I said; 'don't be frightened. I am quite real, not a ghost or anything of that sort; only a poor chap in difficulties,

hiding. Keep quiet, won't you; or else you'll give me away.'

"She sat back upon her heels, shook her hair out of her eyes, and ventured a look at me. I stepped outside the cupboard door to give her a better chance for her scrutiny; there wasn't much light within. She seemed satisfied, for she scrambled to her feet, but did not make for the door as I was afraid she would. She looked about ten years old, a spare little body with a pointed chin and very wide-open gray eyes, not a pretty child, but a sharp one. Evidently she feared no creature of flesh and blood; it was only a ghost she could not face.

"'Look here,' said I, 'my game of hide-and-seek is a matter of almost life and death. Will you keep my secret for a week? I am going in a day or two; to-morrow, if I can get off. Seeing this place was deserted I sheltered here, but I am not going to stay. Will you hold your tongue about seeing me and give me a chance?"

"She nodded. 'All right. But have you been doing anything very wrong?'

"I resolved to trust her. 'Breaking out of prison,' I answered; 'and if I can get down to the coast in three or four days I may get clear away.'

"Her eyes grew round. 'Oh!' she cried, 'are you the man that got out of Dronechester Gaol? Dad was reading about it; he said it was such a plucky thing he hoped they wouldn't catch him.'

"'Thank you; then I may rely on you? Now trot off and keep the others from coming here, won't you?'

"'Oh, that's all right; they won't come,' she said;

'we are all in a funk of this passage directly it begins to get dark.' She perched herself on the window-seat, regarding me thoughtfully. 'I was thinking,' she said, 'if we could dress you up somehow, you'd have a much better chance. You do look awfully odd, you know. You don't mind my saying so, do you?'

"'I know I do; I'm a scare-crow.'

"'And scare-crows don't walk about; you'd be all right standing on one leg in a field. But the things in the charade box are all queer, somehow. You'd look odder still in a cocked hat or a judge's wig. I have it!' she cried suddenly. 'There's a lovely suit of my eldest brother's he left for the rummage sale. Mummy gave them me to sew on the tickets. You shall have them; they'll do you beautifully.' Then, with a sudden compunction, 'Oh, I do hope it isn't sacrilege! It was for the church, you know.'

"She was such a quaint mixture with her pluck and her terrors, her shrewd common sense and her little superstitions.

"'Oh, I don't think it is,' I said gravely. 'Isn't it one of the works of mercy to clothe the naked?'

"'Never mind,' she said, 'I'll risk it.' She jumped off the window-sill. 'I do wish I could get you something to eat; you do look so hungry. Couldn't I just say to mummy I wanted some bread and meat for a very poor man?'

"'If you do, I'm lost. Grown-up people are apt to take peculiar views of their duty. Haven't you found that out yet, my dear?'

"She nodded. 'That's true; they generally do. Well, you can have all the twists Joey and I made

this afternoon, if he hasn't been and eat them all up; and I'll get a few sausages, if I can afford it. It isn't that I'm mean,' she hastened to add, 'only we can't get at our money boxes without such a lot of explanation. I'll whip round with the things to-night when I'm supposed to be gone to bed; they won't come upstairs till after prayers, and I shall be back long before then. I'd better scoot now, for it is so quiet I believe the others have gone home without me, and they'll be coming back to look for me, when they find I'm not there.'

"I popped her through the scullery window, and saw her whisk over the gate.

"She was as good as her word: I was on the look-out between eight and nine when she flew panting up to the window, dumped two bundles, a big and a little one, into my arms, and was off again before I had time to thank her.

"That child had a head on her shoulders; she had forgotten nothing. There was not only the Norfolk suit she had promised; she had even put in coarse worsted stockings and a tie. The clothes were a bit the worse for wear, but what of that? They made a new man of me; I left the hunted vagabond behind me as I softly shut the gate, and stepped out across the dewy fields in the first light of morning.

"Early as I was, somebody was already astir. As I crossed the field at the back of the house I saw a sun-bonnet bobbing above the mushrooms, and my little friend paid me the compliment of mistaking me for her brother, and threw herself into my arms before she realised who it was. When she did she danced

round me, clapping her hands in glee. 'I really did think for a minute you were Hugh,' she said, 'though I was looking for you. I came out mushrooming by myself, on purpose to see you go.'

"'So you think I may pass muster?' I said, 'and see here: I have got all the tickets you sewed on to the clothes, and if I get safe away I will send you the money for the church: that will make all square, won't it?'

"'Not till you can quite afford it,' she said earnestly.

"'Well, they weren't priced high, so I ought to before long, and then you'll know I'm safe.' That made her quite happy, and she stood on the stile, waving her hand to me till I was out of sight.

"Clothes make the man: no one thought of stopping me now or putting any inconvenient questions; no more skulking and roundabout ways. I made straight for Bewdley Water and got there towards evening of the third day. It seemed, however, that a watch was still being kept. Not far from the spot where I hoped to meet Humphrey a couple of coastguardsmen were patrolling. I went up and accosted them, asking if they could let me have a boat; I wanted to drop down the river, I said, to see if a friend's yacht which I expected to stand in and pick me up were anywhere about. They were very sorry, they were on duty. There was a rumour that an escaped convict, of whom I might have heard, was lurking about somewhere and would probably try to take to the water. 'You don't mean that fellow is at large still?' said I. 'Well, I own I'm half sorry for

the poor beggar, and almost wish he might get off.' They informed me that they had seen a gipsy chap with a boat a little below, a clumsy affair, but it might serve my turn, and one of them was so obliging as to walk down with me, hail Humphrey, and assist me to make a bargain with him; he the while maintaining a churlish and gruff demeanour and making a great favour of taking me.

"So that was the end of my adventure. In two days I was in France, in a week more I had gained the south and taken ship at Marseilles for Constantinople. I sent my little friend the value of her invaluable clothes with something to the good; begging her to repay Mr. Oswald for his involuntary hospitality, and get herself a small souvenir of the poor tramp she had helped in his extremity."

It had been a long story, and the shadows of the high hedge were sloping all down the hillside in exaggerated tenuity. Jasper drew out his pipe and began to fill it deliberately. And yet the gist of the story had not been told: to him the getting out seemed the point; to her the getting in. A late lark rose, sang a stave or two, then fluttered twittering down to his nest in the grass hard by.

"But, Jasper——"

"Well, what? That's all the story."

"Not quite. You've never told me what they put you there for."

"No more I did. It was a trivial business to have led to such a coil, and it was about the most foolish action of my life; running my neck into somebody else's noose, and trying to befriend a chap who threw

me over. I told you of my bed in the hay, didn't I? I am a light sleeper, as those who lie in the open are bound to be, and I overheard a couple of keepers laying a trap for a friend of mine—or a man I thought so. The fellow had done me many a good turn; besides, I have a sneaking kindness for poachers—if I am not one myself, it is only because I hate to kill the trusting little beasts who have taken me for their brother; not the least out of respect to the game-laws—so I made up my mind to try and give my friend the tip. I thought I knew where I should find him, but I was too long burying that precious fiddle of mine, and by a stupid blunder I fell right into the jaws of the enemy. They were reinforced by a Bobby, too. I always think that is a mean thing for keepers to do; and the Bobby and I got into a wrestling match. I, naturally trying to do the best I could for myself, arranged that when we toppled over the bank into the river, as we inevitably must, he should fall undermost. As ill-luck would have it there was a big stone just there, and though the fellow wasn't killed he was rather badly damaged, and it comes expensive to break the head of a Bobby. When I struggled up out of the water, and found my friend Jake assisting in my capture, I knew the game was up. I have no doubt that, if I had been a genuine poacher, Jake would have stood by me, but I wasn't his sort, and I might look out for myself. Such evidence as was extracted from him all told against me, so I found myself committed for trial at the Dronechester assizes, charged with assaulting a policeman in the discharge of his duty. If it had been only the poaching affray

it would not have been of much consequence, but this was a serious charge; and though the injury to the poor fellow was more his own fault than mine, I got a pretty heavy sentence. Well, you know the rest."

"So that was the beginning of your wandering life," said Phenice.

"The beginning! My good child, no! I was a vagrant at six years old. My earliest recollection is of running away from the nursemaid who was sent to conduct me to school, and spending an endless day roaming solitary in the marshes, living on blackberries. As to the times I ran away from school and was gone sometimes for a week or more, they are past all counting."

"But why did you?"

"Why? Who can say? Myself least of all."

He struck a match, sheltering it in the hollow of his hand, that curious hand that could have told so much, could Phenice have read the signs; long, supple, brown, and roughened, yet with the indescribable marks of race about it.

"Jasper, if you would only tell me about yourself."

"About myself? Why, who else has all this long tale been about?"

"I know; but I mean who you are, and your people, and how you come to be so unlike everybody."

He finished lighting his pipe, rose, and strolled away. She sat where he had left her, perplexed, dismayed. The cry of Elsa was in her heart, but unlike Elsa she would not ask again. Presently he came back.

"I hate to have to justify myself, even to you," he

said, "but there are some things you have a right to ask. I have never taken unfair advantage of any man, nor done any deed of violence to man or beast except in self-defence, and no woman has anything against me. Is this business a thing that must stand between you and me?"

"My dear," she said, "you may have been in prison, and you may have broken the law, but there's nothing that lowers you in what you've done. I'm not afraid to trust you."

"Then—since folks' memories have been refreshed about it all—the sooner you can be ready the sooner I shall be safe."

## IV.

TIME was when Phenice had looked forward to the weekly jaunt into Dronechester on a market-day as a welcome break in the monotony of everyday life. The early start, jogging elbow to elbow with grandad or Dan in the high dogcart across the downs in the fresh morning air; the very putting on of one's best clothes so early in the day; the cheerful encounters with acquaintances and exchange of news; the sight of smart things in the shop windows; the rendezvous at Aunt Castleworthy's; even Alma's fluent gossip, punctuated by Lois' severe comments, had a certain charm. But of late these things had somehow lost their savour; the life of streets and houses did not interest Jasper; even in his absence she felt nearer to him on the bleak hill-side than in the Dronechester shops or in her great-aunt's parlour. For weeks she had contentedly let Andrew set off without her, armed with a paper of written instructions, but the Saturday after listening to Jasper's tale she suddenly announced her intention of going too.

"Time you did, I think," said Andrew, "after Aunt Castleworthy prancing out here to see what had become of you."

It was not altogether a sense of family duty, however, nor yet the desire to take leave of her relations that took her, but there were certain household plen-

ishings needed, beyond the capacity of a man to see to, and if she were to forsake her home she would like to leave it well provided. Moreover her own wardrobe must have some additions. "You cannot take a trousseau on tramp," Jasper had said, and of that she was well aware, but a strong tweed walking suit she must have, stout boots, and a short, rough cloak. Even the most unworldly woman cannot but reckon among the pleasures of getting wed the possession, for perhaps the first time in her life, of full sets of everything new at once, to say nothing of finery undreamed of at other times, and it was with a sigh that Phenice relinquished secret visions of the fine white stitchery that should never be hers, and set her mind to providing of these uninteresting, useful garments.

Naturally, under the circumstances, she avoided asking her cousin Alma to help her choose her things. Alma loved shopping and, having very little money of her own to spend, took great delight in assisting a friend with unlimited and contradictory advice, turning over and pricing everything, and finally going away without buying anything at all. Phenice's purchases on this occasion certainly would not have interested her, and they were soon done; Andrew's took much longer.

"Go on up the hill," he said to her, meeting her as she came out of the draper's. "Tell Aunt I'll be there by tea-time."

She knew it was her duty to make her way up to Rosebank Villa, to sit in the stuffy drawing-room and admire Alma's painted china plates and Louis'

scrawly chair-backs, and face the comments on Jasper she knew would be her portion, but she lingered, unwilling. Slowly she crossed the sunny Close where the rooks were cawing lazily in the tops of the lime trees, and the long shadows lay across the smooth-shaven, bright green turf.

The great west door stood open; shade and coolness and a far-away, mingled sound of organ and voices stole out. She turned in and went softly up the aisle. This was what she liked. At Hampage, as in most country places, there was "church," as the country folk phrased it, or there was not. At eleven o'clock on Sunday everybody went, and those who were very religious went again at six; after that it was locked up from week's end to week's end, and nobody but the woman who cleaned ever thought of wanting to go in. There were no crusaders or brasses, and what else could anyone want in church on a weekday? If service was going on you went in proper time, and took your own seat and your own book, and joined; there was none of this entering into the outer courts of worship for the busy or the wayfarers. Here anyone might turn in out of the din and bustle of the market, might stroll out again if he liked or sit down anywhere in the long nave and, looking up, might see in the far distance, behind the carved screen, the gleam of white surplices and the scarlet of the Dean's hood; might hear the far-off sound of worship and the harmonious thunder of the organ, and then slip out into the world again, no man regarding.

By the time Phenice had got up the hill to her aunt's the spread tea in the dining-room was already in

progress, Andrew had arrived, and all his relations were making a prodigious fuss with him and loading his plate with cold pigeon pie and watercress. She found herself regarded somewhat in the light of a culprit; the mesmeric effect of Jasper's playing had by this time passed from their minds, and the general verdict on her was that, if she had been in a properly repentant frame of mind, she would have come in time for tea. She was not sorry when the entertainment was cut short by the arrival of the dogcart and the cob who must not be kept waiting.

Although she had transacted so little business she was quite tired out, and sat silently beside her cousin as they jogged over the rolling downs in the gathering twilight. They always used to be rather silent together, these two, but now it was silence with a difference. Before it was the complete understanding of use and wont that needed few words; now it was the silence of separateness.

They were late back, but she lingered a minute or two by the orchard gate while Andrew turned the cob into the yard. Maybe it was the last time she would ever drive into Dronechester with Dan to do the errands in the old way, and though she had not cared greatly for it, she had always loved the coming back in the dusk with her parcels and her news, and besides there is always a sadness about last times. How soon, she wondered, did Jasper mean to take her away? Soon, she hoped; home had become strange to her in these last days; she was in no hurry to go in.

A whistle, sharp as that of a corn-crake, cut the silence. She raised her head and listened. Another,

and she moved quickly through the orchard to the other gate.

"Is that you, Jasper?"

"Yes; I have been waiting an age for you. How late you are!"

"Did you want me? I didn't know. We had to go up to Aunt Castleworthy's to tea, and——"

"Another five minutes and I should have been gone. I cannot stay. But I wanted to hold you in my arms just a minute first, to look in your eyes once more before I go."

"Jasper! What do you mean? You are going to take me with you? I am all ready."

She began to tremble violently and laid her hand on the gate to keep herself steady. It seemed a long minute before he spoke, and yet she thought she knew the words he would say, as though she had heard them before.

"No. I am going alone."

"Is it because I said I must have some things, must get ready a little first?" She tried to speak calmly, but there was a piteous quaver in her voice.

"No, no. It is impossible, don't you see?"

He turned aside, and she thought he was going then and there. Her heart stood still, but she uttered no cry of protest. Pride rose up and strangled it.

He came back and took hold of her two wrists.

"See here," he said, "your grandfather has been talking to me. I can't think how I ever came to be such a cad. He took a poor sick wayfarer into his house and tended him, and is the wretch to repay him by stealing his most precious possession? I can't do

it, Phenice. There are some things a man can't do and keep his self-respect."

She tried to pull her hands away from him.

"Am I a bale of goods," she cried angrily, "to be stolen or purchased? I belong to no one to give or keep. You men think of nothing but each other. You talk of the wrong done to him, but what of me, what of me?"

He looked at her wistfully.

"Forgive me, if you can," he said. "Go back, my dear, to your quiet home and your woman's ways, and forget the tramp who crossed your path, and who would have led you a sorry life if he could have had his way."

"Forget! Ah, that is easy enough for a man to say. You will have forgot me before you have crossed a couple of fields. You care for naught but your roving life, and you don't want to be saddled with a woman, and that's all about it. Well, good-bye then, and good luck to you. I bear you no ill will."

"Kiss me then." He was still holding her wrists, and he lifted them and laid her two arms round his neck, but when he put his lips to hers he felt as if he were kissing a dead woman.

. . . . .

"Phenice," said her grandfather as she moved about the kitchen laying the cloth for supper, "I'm afraid you must have took a chill driving in that thin coat. The girls ought to have lent you a shawl or something; you look all pinched and wisht."

## V.

ALACK, the snow and the bitter, bitter wind! All day long the feathery flakes fell on Phenice's heart with a weight like lead, for Jasper might be out in it somewhere, for aught she could tell. It had come sweeping up over the downs on the wings of a black north-easter; a whirling, blinding whiteness that blotted out the whole earth and the sky as well. It had drifted in through the crannies of the shut windows, and piled itself in a solid wall against the door, and now every familiar tree and gate-post stood shrouded, fantastic, menacing. Lovely to look at from the shelter of the safe, warm house, but where was he the while? Oh, if she only knew! Like enough he had gone with the swallows to the countries where winter never comes, as he so often did. At least he might be in shelter under a roof. God grant it! Sitting snug mayhap by some inn fire with the logs piled high and the red curtains drawn close, while she choked down her tears whenever the wind wailed anew in the chimney. It was far more likely than not, if she could only think so, for he was weather-wise as the sailors and the shepherds and the dwellers in the open country always are, and would surely have had the sense, like the birds and beasts, to seek covert before the storm was upon him.

Yet she could not see him so in her mind's eye, which always carried his picture night and day. She

saw him toiling, toiling through the whirling flakes, half blinded, half choked, yet toiling, toiling on. Worse still, when night fell, and the hollows in the downs were brimming over with the billowing whiteness, she pictured him failing, worn-out, lying down to rest out of the wind in one of those hollows that looked so safe and soft and white. Ah, if she were only with him there! her head pillowed on his breast, his arm holding her till they fell asleep together, and the white coverlet was drawn up over them.

At dusk on the second day the wind dropped, the flakes ceased to fall; she put on her snow-shoes and a shawl over her head, and stole up the long pasture to the ridge. All up the slope the snow had been swept clear by the wind as with a broom; it was only the hollows, looking so firm and smooth, that were to be feared. She went on up to the gate from whence she could see the road that wound away into the sunset, and, knocking the snow from the topmost bar, leaned her arms upon it. She was saying some verses softly to herself in an undertone. They were these:

"You were so far away,
  Beyond all help from me,
And so, when skies were grey
  And clouds lowered threateningly,
And the wailing storm-wind blew,
My heart went out to you.

"I always felt afraid
  You were out in the stormy weather,
The rain on your bonny head,
  The wind and the rain together.
Ah, me! I never knew
What harm might come to you."

She shivered and drew her arms away quickly, for the coldness of the rail almost burned her flesh through her woollen sleeve; she would get frost-bitten if she did not move. And yet she hated so to go in; she loathed the shelter of the warm house, the comfort of the fireside. She almost hated her grandfather, sitting so quiet there, rustling his paper as he turned it over, and smoking his long "churchwarden": Andrew, too, coming in late with his tale of slaughtered rabbits, his forebodings about the lambs, his complaints of the growing feebleness of old Zack and the fecklessness of young Zack. Oh, the monotony of it all! Not least of the Saturday news, the scraps of dull gossip from the market; how much Farmer Throop had got for his tegs, or Farmer Weston had had to pay for his fodder, through not laying it in soon enough; or perhaps a bit of scandal he expected her to be interested in, how rumour said old Squire Pretyman had secretly married that handsome wench he took as housekeeper, and she led him a fine life. To it all Phenice listened with eyes that were far away and made little or no comment, and her cousin would relapse into grim taciturnity.

How stupid it all was! What mattered the news of the country-side? Who cared? But she knew in her heart it was because in all the wide world there was only one piece of news she wanted to hear, and for that she dared not ask. Had no one seen or heard of Jasper? Had he never been met with in those parts since that spring day she had watched him disappear over the hill? So talk languished between the three house-mates, and Andrew grew more and more

silent, with a silence that was not tranquil, but brooding.

Phenice moved quietly about her household tasks or sat over her sewing, ministering to the needs of the two men and obeying all their behests; wrapped in a loneliness that was almost palpable, and conscious that though neither grandfather nor cousin addressed a harsh word to her she was in the black books of both; that neither could forgive her for having contemplated, if only for a week, forsaking them and her home at the bidding of that strange and perplexing tramp.

She was not consciously reflecting on the position as she stood there by the gate, but it lay on her heart with a weight she could not shake off. The surface of her mind was occupied in observing the tracks of the small starved creatures that crossed and recrossed the whiteness of the further slope under the beech-trees; little footprints of hares and rabbits and the broader pats of the badger, as well as the delicate crowsfoot of the birds. She was wondering if she could not find means to feed them—the small wild things that Jasper loved. The birds, of course, came daily for supplies, but what could she do for the poor little beasts whose small footprints told of a distracted search for food.

Andrew came up behind her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Good Lord, Phenice! whatever are you about? You'll catch your death. Anybody 'd think you were daft. It's bad enough for a fellow who must needs go the rounds of his folds, if he wouldn't have the

sheep perish for want of looking after; but what on earth a woman who need do nothing but sit at her own fireside wants to come traipsing up here in the snow for beats me."

Phenice drew her shoulder away with a pettishness very unlike her usual tranquillity.

"Oh, I'm all right. There was no call for you to bother yourself about me."

"That's gratitude. The snow's coming on again, and you might easy get lost in a drift between here and the house door, if it was to blow up again as it did last night."

And some wicked spirit in Phenice murmured, "I only wish I might."

. . . . .

Far away the red light was streaming over the snow from the many windows of a wide, white house. All up from the village to the door a pathway had been cleared and trodden by innumerable feet. The curtained windows were shut close, yet through them a sound of revelry escaped; the noise of pounding feet stamping heavily to a measured rhythm; voices that rose and fell, and the high, shrill rapture of dance music.

Inside the big hall was filled with a motley throng: here a smart woman in a Parisian evening gown, a little the worse for wear, was resting her finger tips lightly on the arm of a staid and portly person with side whiskers who could be no other than the chief butler; there an Eton boy was endeavouring to whirl a solid personage in violet silk into the mazes of a waltz with his arm round her broad waist, while in

a corner the schoolmaster was trying to preserve the superiority of his deportment under a fire of chaff from two French ladies' maids. In the drawing-room doorway stood Sir John and my lady, very affable. In a word, the annual servants' ball at Culver Place was in progress and, after having been threatened with utter extinction, was turning out a greater success than ever.

Supper was over now and the fun was waxing fast and furious. The affair had begun quietly; the schoolmaster had been engaged to play for the dancing and had strummed away very nicely on the old schoolroom piano that was always used on these occasions; they all said what good time he kept, and things were going in an extremely decorous manner that rejoiced the heart of the butler, when in the middle of the evening, nobody quite knew whence nor how, the tramping fiddler had appeared. Mr. Barbey had been banished from the piano stool, for the fiddler preferred to play without accompaniment and could always make his fiddle sound like three, and, hey presto! the whole room had been swept into the whirl.

Fashionable guests staying in the house and kindly patronising the entertainment, old servants of staid demeanour, young and giggling housemaids, bashful gardeners and grooms, all seemed to have been bitten by the tarantula; all seized each other and danced as though wings were in their heels. Why, the very walls danced in the flickering firelight as sparks from the great logs flew up the chimney; the lights danced, the holly berries shone and glanced, even the pearls in

my Lady's cap seemed to have caught the general infection.

"My love," said Sir John, "I think it is time for us to withdraw; these good people will enjoy themselves better without restraint."

She laughed a little. "I don't see much restraint about it now. I never saw them so merry. That fiddler is a wonderful player; he quite makes me feel —shall we?"

And she flung her train over her arm.

The wildest revelry must have an end; the feet of the dancers were weary at last, though the fiddler looked as if he could have played for another four-and-twenty hours without flinching.

In the midst of the hubbub of departure two pretty girls approached him; one the acknowledged belle of the ball, the head gardener's daughter, whom the house servants described as "a minx," the other her friend and foil.

"Well, fiddler," cried the leader, "you did give us a tune that last time! You are the one to play for a merry-making and no mistake. What shall we give him; eh, Louie? I declare I think he deserves a kiss."

She came a little closer with her pretty curly head on one side.

"Which of us shall pay you?" she said.

He was just laying his fiddle in its case. He looked round with a quizzical smile at the softly curving lips, and straightened himself with a courtly bow.

"You do me too much honour," he said.

"Well, I never! I suppose you are afraid your missis would be jealous."

"My missis is in here"—he tapped his fiddle-case—"and she would be frightfully jealous. Besides, what of that chap with a red geranium in his buttonhole who had so many dances?"

"Get along with you! I think you're a dreadful rude man."

"Look here, fiddler, what is your charge for to-night?" said the young master of the house, coming up, chinking some money in his hand.

The fiddler shrugged his shoulders. "What you please—or nothing, if you like. Nobody engaged me so far as I know. Your bailiff brought me in, and somebody said 'Play,' so I played. I don't know that you owe me anything."

"Oh, but we do; it was ripping."

He reflected a moment; three and six had satisfied the modest claims of the schoolmaster, but it was gold that slipped into Jasper's palm.

"And I say," the young man added, "couldn't you come and play for us when we have our proper dance for the neighbours, don't you know, in about three weeks' time?"

Jasper shook his head. "I don't play at 'proper' dances," he said. "Besides, in three weeks' time I shall be in Spain most likely; that is, if I don't go to Cyprus."

The night was far advanced, the sky was quite clear of snow now, and the wind seemed holding its breath, the stars were large and clear and hard. The village street looked weird with the white roofs and dark

walls. The last sounds of talk and laughter had died away, and all the lights were out. It was too cold for sleeping under the stars, and presently Jasper, too, would seek his bed in the ale-house, but for a few minutes he lingered.

How small the world seemed. A little point hanging amidst those myriads of shining worlds, and yet so wide that a moving speck of humanity might spend his whole life wandering over it and not see a tithe of its hills and valleys, of its cities and its long, winding roads. And amid the immensity just one thing that mattered: one small home hidden away between the lonely hills and, watching in it, one woman's heart that ached for him, round which, roam where he might, his thoughts circled like homing pigeons.

"Why can't I forget her?" he said. "I always said I would let no woman spoil my life."

And then a stray dog who had been shut out, and was howling in desolation of spirit, ceased his complaints and came and thrust his cold nose into Jasper's hand with the certainty of receiving comfort; a conviction that was not deceived, for Jasper took him in with him when he went to bed, and let him curl himself up on his feet, underneath the coverlet.

## *BOOK IV.*

### THE OPEN ROAD.

Now the joys of the road are chiefly these:
A crimson touch on the hard-wood trees;

A vagrant's morning wide and blue
In early fall, when the wind walks, too;

A shadowy highway cool and brown,
Alluring up and enticing down.

An open hand, an easy shoe,
And a hope to make the day go through.

—*Bliss Carman.*

No girl
Mewed in a silken chamber from the air
And the great living wind of human deeds;
But out with him among the whirling leaves
Of mortal wishes, letting all the rain
Of the world's weepings sweep against my face.

—*Lord de Tabley.*

And on her lover's arm she leant,
  And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hills they went
  In that new world that is the old:

. . . . .

And o'er the hills, and far away
  Beyond their utmost purple rim
Beyond the night, across the day
  Thro' all the world she followed him.

—*Tennyson.*

# I.

PHENICE stood outside the gate that led from the last field out on to the warren. Behind her lay the farm, folded close between the hills, wrapped round with its sheltering elms; sleeping; hushed; its windows all blinded like closed eyes, no one watching whither she went; before her the long-limbed down stretching away, away, with its faint tracks leading up over the brow of the hill. She had always wanted to get out of the hollow, away over the brim, and now at last she was going, yet she stood still a moment with her hand upon the gate, and a perceptible shiver ran over her.

It was cold, though not a breath was stirring; cold with the deathly chill that comes even in summer when night dies, and still with a breathless, waiting hush, for soon day would be born. There was something almost terrible in being out alone in the dim, vast spaces like this. She could almost see the edge of the great earth swing over to meet the sun. A little breeze got up and ran sighing across the grasses at her feet, and a wisp of cloud flushed suddenly like a girl's cheek. Then a lark rose and mounted straight, and, as he poured down his shrill melody, a flame sprang into life on the crest of the eastern hill, and a flood of liquid light streamed like molten gold over

all the ridges. Phenice let the gate swing to behind her and stepped out bravely into the sunshine.

A change had come over everything: the sloping shoulder of the down, which had lain ink-black against the primrose dawn, melted now and lost itself in shimmering, golden haze; the wind, which had held its breath, waiting for the sunrise, swept through the bents and murmured in the ragged pines on the Old Beacon with its sea-shell murmur; the sky seemed dripping with music, for that herald lark had been followed by thousands more, and life was all astir once more. The sheep began to crop the fine, dewy herbage with a crisp sound of enjoyment and satisfaction, the rabbits were scuttling in and out, whisking their little white tails as though they had all the work of the world to finish before nightfall, and a noble cock pheasant in all his burnished bravery flew up with a whir and rustle and made for the coppice on the hillside.

Yes, it was a new day, the first of new days, for Phenice had cut herself loose from the old life that should know her no more, and was setting forth to meet the unknown. She sat down by the wayside presently to eat the breakfast of brown bread and butter and milk that she had brought with her, and wondered where and what her next meal would be. Not with any apprehension though, no more than the wild creatures who had all come out to seek their daily bread. The complications of humanity had all fallen away—melted before the dawn. Then she rose with a brief thanksgiving, and continued her journey.

As she travelled on the sun grew strong, but on the

uplands a clear light breeze was always stirring; it was only in the dips, on the shadeless slopes where she lost the air, that the heat got oppressive. It was lonesome, too, but she never minded that; she was used to solitude, and the silence held an unbroken music that cheered her spirits, and when at noon the shrilling of the larks fell silent, the ceaseless humming of the bees in the thyme made itself heard. Now and then she passed a shepherd and his flock, and that put her in mind of old Zack. She wished she had been able to say good-bye to him, but that would have involved explanations, and explanations she could not make—even to herself. To her grandfather, indeed, she had bidden farewell last night, and had told him briefly that she was going, but she doubted if he had grasped her meaning or her resolve. Andrew was away, attending a distant cattle market; he would not be home till late in the day.

And why was she going? What had summoned her? Truly she could not tell; only night after night she had dreamed that Jasper called her, that he had need of her, was in trouble or suffering. Sometimes, even when she was about her work, the sense of being called would come so suddenly upon her that she would break off in what she was doing and stand "'mazed," as her grandfather put it. Then one day, after the long silence, a scrap of news had come. Old Zack had seen a man who had been to the hop-gardens at Alresworthy to arrange for the autumn picking, and he brought word that the tramping fiddler was lying sick in one of the hop-pickers' barns. How could she keep from going to him?

By midday she reached a secluded village, where a quiet little inn called the Wheatsheaf afforded her rest and food. It was almost deserted at that time of day, and she had the parlour to herself for her simple meal, and could amuse herself while it was preparing by studying the framed and glazed worsted samplers with which it was decorated and a pair of wonderful, enlarged and tinted portraits of the landlord and his spouse, which smirked at each other over the sideboard. It would have been wise to stay there till the cool of the evening, but she was restless till she should reach her goal.

The afternoon wore on, and still the long ridges of down followed each other. It grew hotter and hotter, and her hair clung to her forehead in little damp tendrils: her feet began to feel weary, but she would fain reach Alresworthy before nightfall.

I think one must have been born and bred in the down country to know the beauty of it—and the unutterable sadness. The ordinary lover of nature must have mountains, snowy peaks and fearsome ravines, lakes and waterfalls to excite his sensibilities, but to those who love them these quiet uplands have a voice. Hear this from one who understands:

"How strangely spiritual this solid earth, of chalk and nibbling sheep, can sometimes seem; what an expression of diaphanousness it sometimes wears. So a poet's face, long since materialised, will sometimes at evening shine with a boyish star-light, and seem all spirit for a brief, elated hour.

"The beech trees and the hedges which had some-

what disguised the lines of the land hitherto, had suddenly disappeared, and there was nothing but the long-limbed down lying vast and still beneath the solemn evening sky. The silence seemed like an exquisite vessel of porcelain. One scarcely dared breathe lest it should break." *

So dusk fell. Phenice sat on the side of a trench to rest; her long day's walk was behind her, and she began to feel weary and home-sick. The red sun, who had borne her gallant company all day, had sunk behind the further hill and taken the hope and joy of the day with him. The shadows had hardly yet crept up to the knees of the hills; rather they seemed to have melted in transparent light, and the vastness had something terrifying in it. Here, among the monotonous sweeps, ridge after ridge, it was like being at sea out of sight of land. Behind her, hidden as it seemed for ever from her eyes, lay the one spot of earth where she belonged, and she had left it of her own free will and would most likely never see it again. And if she found no other home, what would become of her? if Jasper —ah, no! she dared not think of it. She sprang to her feet and walked on.

Presently, as the shadows deepened, she found herself between hedgerows, descending a dusty lane. She had not come nearly so far on her journey as she had planned. Soon after getting beyond the part that was familiar to her, she blundered amongst the confusing tracks, one so like another and, though a solitary shepherd had put her in her way again, she had lost much

* Richard le Gallienne, "Prose Fancies."

time and got a little out of heart as well. She felt sure she would not reach Alresworthy that night, at any rate not before dark.

She seemed now to be coming to a village; at the bottom of the hill she could dimly make out clustering chimneys among the trees, and light streaming from uncurtained windows. There were sounds of life, too, welcome after the long day's silence: a baby cried down there among the cottages, and a woman's voice was uplifted singing to it; a man and a girl passed, going for an evening stroll; and a group of children rushed by, having a bedtime romp, as might be guessed from the shrill call of the mothers below. Here at last was warm human life and homes, but no home for her; and how should she find Jasper? She paused a minute and looked up and down the lane, doubtful, perplexed.

A voice addressed her over the hedge, a tender voice, though worn and cracked with old age.

"You look tired, ma'am. Won't you step inside and rest ye a bit?"

The well-bred country poor are much more ceremonious than their betters; they always address a stranger as sir or ma'am, whatever the apparent rank may be.

Phenice looked round. An old woman in a gathered cotton bonnet, with a deep curtain such as haymakers wear, had raised her bent figure from stooping over a flower-bed, her hands full of groundsell and shepherd's weather-glass. Clearly the footstep of a passing wayfarer was too rare a sound to go unnoticed, even in the absorbing occupation of weeding.

"Come your ways in, ma'am. You looks all wore out."

"I am tired," gratefully admitted Phenice, as she unlatched the gate and followed the kind woman up the uneven brick path to the door. "I have come a long way across the downs and have been out all day." Her voice had a worn and weary tone.

The cottage was low and small, with a deep, thatched roof that reached nearly to the ground behind, but it had a certain dignity of its own, enhanced by the venerable yew-tree that stood beside the gate and a great straggling pine that stretched protecting arms above it. Inside it was already nearly dark; the branches of the ink-black yew overshadowed the small window and kept out the lingering sunset light. The old woman lighted a tallow candle and set it in an antique flat pewter candle-stick, and by its faint, flickering light Phenice could make out an open hearth and a big, yawning chimney like the one at home, a heavy solid worm-eaten table and an elbow chair, all wearing an air of ancient respectability which told of long dwelling in one spot.

The glimpse of face that could be seen under the poke bonnet well matched the voice; wrinkled and shrunk, yet in its soft outlines telling of a bygone prettiness and an abiding sweetness. There was gentleness in the tremulous hands and faded eyes. She was busy stepping to and fro, arranging this and that; throwing her weeds tidily on the fire, and washing the mould from her hands at the sink in the little scullery at the back before she would touch plates and glasses. Phenice sat and dreamily watched her,

thankful to sit still and rest against the patchwork cushions of the elbow chair, till the old woman dragged the heavy table a little nearer to her and set a tray on the corner of it. Upon it stood a large slice of lardy-cake like heavy pie-crust without any inside to it, and a tall old-fashioned cut glass containing a liquid like clear Turkish amber.

"Don't be afraid of it, my dear. 'Tis mead; 'twill hearten you up a bit. I makes it myself, so I know 'tis good. But there! you'll say 'your trumpeter is dead,' sure, as my poor mother used to."

Phenice sipped and then sipped again. "You may well boast of it," she said. "It is delicious. It is like—I don't know what it is like."

"Well now, I'll tell you what a friend o' mine who comes here sometimes says of it. ''Tis like drinkin' liquid sunshine, mother,' he says, says he."

"It seems to put spirit into one like the sunshine," said Phenice, drinking again and straightening her figure, which had fallen into the relaxed lines of lassitude as she leaned back against the cushions. "I shall be able to get on splendidly now, thanks to your kindness."

"And where may you be goin,' ma'am, if I may make so bold as to arst?"

"I meant to sleep at Alresworthy to-night, but I'm afraid it is some way yet. Can you tell me of any nice quiet inn there, where I could get a bed? I have to make some inquiries there, and perhaps go further to-morrow. I hardly know."

"To Alresworthy to-night? 'Tis a lonesome road, and nigh dark a'ready. 'Tis a good three mile or

more, and if you was to go to the Goat and Compasses—— Why not bide here,' long o' me for to-night, and go your ways along in the morning? Do 'ee now," as Phenice hesitated.

"If you are sure it would not be putting you out——"

"Putting me out? Not a bit of it! I've neither chick nor child, and here I sits day in, day out, till I 'most forgets the sound o' my own voice."

"I should like it," said Phenice. "It does seem so home-like here."

"Then you shall stop," cried the old body with enthusiasm, "and do me a pleasure in stopping. I've two nice rooms up over, and if the beds is old-fashioned they're soft. Just come up and see 'em."

And taking the candle, she led the way upstairs with agility, notwithstanding that every step was worn into a hollow by the tread of feet long still.

"This looks a very old house," said Phenice, standing under a heavy beam, beside the solid oak bedstead, where the thick feather-bed billowed up under the scanty blue-cotton counterpane.

"Ah, you may say so, my dear! There's been things happenin' here hundreds o' years afore you and me was born: 'fightings and fears within, without,' as the hymn says, and King Charles a-hidin' in that very chimbley as you was a-settin' by."

"You don't say so!" said Phenice. "Do tell me about it."

"I will, my love, presently, when we're settin' down quiet. I must put out your clean sheets to air first."

It seemed wonderful to Phenice that she should find a welcome the very first day of her wanderings in this little ancient home among the hills. It seemed somehow to bring her nearer to Jasper, for this was the way he lived, making friends as he went, and finding chance harbour where he might.

## II.

By and by when, her hospitable cares having been attended to, the old body sat a while opposite to her guest with her hands lying idle in her lap, in the little alcove formed by the coarse, sweet-smelling sheets over the airing horse, Phenice returned to the story of the old house.

"What were you telling me about King Charles?" she asked.

"Well, I dunno, I'm sure, if I can tell it rightly. 'Twas a long while back as it all happened, before my good man's father's grandfather's time, but he set great store by the place because of it. Folks do say as we ought to make money by it, but, law! 'Tis so out of the way, and I wouldn't care to have a parcel o' strangers clutterin' in and out, arstin' questions about everythink."

"You don't mind my asking?" said Phenice.

"Bless your heart, no! That's differnt. You see that girt oven? He do run in behind the chimbley, awful deep. Well, 'twas there as the king was hid; and in there, as they tell, the night before the battle, we did bake a mortial lot of bread for the king's soldiers."

"We?" threw in Phenice, perplexed.

"Oh, when I say 'we,' 'tis but a manner o' speakin', you must understand. In course I weren't

born nor thought of, but I heerd tell on it so much I feel most as if I'd a-ben there all the time. My husband's folks was here then, and they was my folks, too, since we was cousins. Well, now, you look at that there board on the back-kitchen floor. You'd never guess as there's a deep well under there; now, would ye? And that's where they got the water for the troops. They fought a terrible great battle over there t'other side of the down, and the king's side they got the worst of it. Butcher's Close they calls that big field that lays just under the hill."

She got up as she spoke, and reached down three cannon-balls from the high, narrow shelf above the hearth, where they reposed amongst the spotted china dogs and shepherdesses. "Only to think," said she, "how many poor souls they may have sent to their last account."

Phenice held them in her hand, musing as she gazed into the yawning mouth of the big chimney. "Fancy it's being the same for all these years!" she said.

"Oh, yes, my poor good man would have it all kep' just as it was. I won't deny as I did wish for a kitchener. It be such a savin' o' dirt, let alone trouble, but there! I wouldn't put one now he's dead and gone and can't help hisself, not if you was to give me one for love. The man he called round not long before Mr. Poate was took to his long home, with the pictur's and all, and explainin' about the weekly payments made easy, and I says, 'Jeremy,' I says, 'think what a savin' of fuel it 'ud be, and if so be as it please the Lord to take ye,'—for he was gettin'

into years,—'I shan't have nobody to chop the wood.'

"'Martha,' he says, 'in that chimbley King Charles was hid so sure as ever he was hid in the oak-tree, and I'd as soon,' he says, 'take and cut down that oak-tree to 'eat the oven as I'd block up that there chimbley.'

"But I'll not deny as 'twere a disapp'intment to find as 'twern't the same King Charles, after all."

"Wasn't it?" asked Phenice, with vague memories of the battle of Worcester and the adventures of Charles II., though she knew that Worcester was many a long mile away. "Who was it, then?"

"Well, my dear, it appears it was his father. There was a man come here the other day—he do often come by this way, and always step in here for a glass o' my mead. 'Twas him said about its being like drinkin' the sunshine—well, this man set there just where you be settin', and told it all as he might be readin' it out of a printed book.

"'Twas in them old fightin' times I was a-tellin' you of, only a goodish bit after our battle. I dare say you may have heard tell of Old Noll, who cut the king's head off? Well, he'd put him in prison up London way, but the king and two of the gentlemen that waited on him contrived to get out, and came ridin' down this way, from London town. Twa'n't the quickest road, but 'twas the quietest. The downs was just so lonesome then, I expect, as what they be now, and they didn't think to meet anybody, but the Roundhead soldiers was all over the place, and the king's servants got wind of a party of them not fur

off; so they come in here, and the king he crep' into the chimbley,—into the oven belike, for a man might lie there very snug, so long as you didn't 'eat it,—and the two gentlemen set by the table drinkin' mead, till the troopers was gone. Next day they went on down to the sea, but them two that was with him, whether they was fools or whether they was knaves, delivered of him up into the hands of his enemies. There, I nearly cried to hear tell on it, for all it was so long ago. 'I know what it is to get out of a cage, mother,' says Mr. Jasper, 'and if ever they'd caught me and put me in again I'd ha' broke my 'eart,' he says, says he."

Phenice sprang to her feet. "Jasper, Jasper!" she cried. "Did you say Jasper? Where is he?"

"Ah, where indeed? Here to-day and gone to-morrow. And what may you be wantin' with Mr. Jasper?"

"I am looking for him," she said. "I must find him; can you help me?"

Mrs. Poate pushed her bonnet back and looked at her. "Be he your man?" she asked.

"No, but he is going to be. We were to have been married nearly a year ago, but my people were against it, and he went away. And now he is ill and I must go to him. Help me to find him."

"Sit ye down again, my dear. Your people was right. Go you home again in the morning, and try to forget him."

"I thought you spoke as if you liked him," said Phenice with a choke in her voice. "Do you know any harm of him?"

"Nay, I know aught agen him; moreover I do like the lad: he comes in here like a flash of sunshine and always a kind word for the old mother, as he calls me. But to wed him! Ye might so well wed the Man in the Moon."

Phenice let her hands drop wearily in her lap. "Nevertheless I must find him. I belong to him; if he is sick and needs me, I must get to him somehow."

"Has he sent to you?"

She shook her head. "He won't do that, however much he needs me. He is proud; he said he would never come back, so I must go to him."

"And where be ye goin' to look for en?"

"I was told he was at Alresworthy," faltered Phenice, "sick in one of the hop-pickers' barns."

"Ay, so he were a week or two back, as I heerd tell; but he come by here one day since then. A Tuesday, it must ha' ben, for I'd my arms in the washtub when he come; but where he was there he won't be, that you may rely on."

"Then what shall I do?"

Only one day's search, and already she felt discouraged. The magnitude of her task in tracing a will-o'-the-wisp appalled her.

"Bide a bit," said Mrs. Poate, with one meditative forefinger pressed against her chin. "Tis a folly in me, no doubt, to help you when you'd better by half give it up and go home again—still I do mind he talked of going to the great pony fair at Lyndwood. He do like them things; he's more'n half a gipsy himself. If you was to look for en there, happen you might find en."

"When? How soon will it be?"

For answer the old woman crossed the room to the bureau and began rummaging under the big Bible for an almanac. None of your Churchman's or Parish almanacs with texts, but one of those local, crudely printed country affairs that are still hawked about in lonely parts, filled with such matters as are important to the country-side: mops, fairs, and markets, interspersed with predictions in the style of Old Moore. She brought it close to the candle and drew a shaking finger down the column, till she found the date she sought.

"There," she said, "August the eleventh. You've got a week to get there, but if you'll take an old woman's advice, you'll go on no such a wild-goose chase. The man must ha' bewitched you, to be sure, for a decent woman like you to leave her home and tramp off after him. 'Taint respectable; no, reelly it aint."

Phenice rose from her chair. She spoke very quietly, but she trembled.

"I'll wish you good-night and go on my way now," she said. "You've been very kind in offering shelter to a wayfarer you knew nothing of, but I quite understand you'd rather not harbour a disreputable tramp, and it wouldn't be fair to take advantage. Thank you for what you have given me. You'll let me——" She pulled out her purse.

"Nay, nay, my dear; I don't want nothin' for a bit and a sup. You was kindly welcome. Sit ye down again. I didn't goo for to insult ye. I did but mane to advise ye right. I felt like a mother to ye the

minute ye crossed the threshold. Now don't ye be tetchy."

"I don't mean to be touchy," said Phenice, smiling a little sadly, "but I begin to understand what it means to break with custom. I see I shall be an outcast."

"Law! don't call yourself such hard names. But you'll think better of it now, won't ye, and go home-along in the mornin'?"

She shook her head. "I have made my choice and I shall abide by it: what is good enough for Jasper is good enough for me."

"But look ye now: a woman's differnt. The wandering life he leads would be crule hard for you. A woman wants a place to herself, if it is but a little one."

"Perhaps, but every place is empty and drear to me now without him."

"Well, well! as my good man used to say, ye might so well argey with a peg as with a woman when she's set. Look, the candle is pretty nigh flared out, and we'd ought to be in our beds. The night 'll bring counsel mayhap."

It brought no change of purpose, however, to Phenice. The bodily weariness of the long day in the open air overcame the strangeness of her position, and as her tired limbs sank into the soft feathers underneath the poor little blue-and-white coverlet, her mind sank into the land of dreams, where she was wandering all night across blue hills, with Jasper's arm round her.

When the quarrelling of the starlings in the eaves

woke her, she lay still for a few minutes, mistily wondering where she was and how she came there, and hardly able to disentangle the dream from the reality, but presently, when the first red rays of sunshine fell across her bed, she remembered that she was utterly alone; that she had broken irrevocably with the past, and not yet found the future. She could not go back; she must go forward.

She found the old body already stirring when she got down, arrayed in her sun-bonnet and laden with buckets to take to the well.

"Let me do that," said Phenice, possessing herself of the buckets; "I'm used to work."

"Well, dear, and how have you slep'? Will ye bide with me to-day, and get home in the cool of the evenin'?"

Phenice kissed her. "I must go on my way early," she said. "I've been thinking, I don't want to go through Dronechester to Lyndwood; it would be all back the way I have come. I shall keep south-east and work round through Bytheford, and get to the forest down Greathampton way."

Mrs. Poate had the rare wisdom of knowing when she was beaten; she made no further attempt to change Phenice's purpose.

"Well, if I was you," she said, "I should take the train, if so-be as you have the money for your fare. I don't hold with trains myself, never havin' had occasion to go so fur, but they tell me 'tis a wonderful convaniency, and you young folks aint timorsome. Happen I could lend ye sixpence or so," seeing that Phenice hesitated.

"You kind soul! But it is not that; I have plenty. But Jasper hates trains, he never goes in one; I'd sooner walk. And besides," she added, "if I get there too soon I shall have to wait about, and I don't care to hang round where they are making ready for a fair till I have found him."

"Well, if you'll just wait a bit till I have washed up my breakfast things and made my beds,—for I can't bear to leave my place in a cuttle,—I'll bring you goin' a bit. 'Taint so often as I gets comp'ny," she added, "but what I'm loth to say good-bye."

"It must be lonesome for you, living all by yourself. Don't you have visitors sometimes; the clergyman's wife, or people like that?"

The old woman laughed cheerfully. "I'm too well off, my dear, that's where it is. This bit of a place is my own freehold, and what with my garden-stuff and my bees and one thing and another, I makes out pretty well. The quality's very kind, but if you don't want no tickets nor no loan blankets, nor yet to pay into the provident club, they think you don't want nothin'. If I was ill, they'd come. Oh, I make no doubt they'll come when I'm at my latter end."

It was sweet to Phenice to be seen off on the second day of her loneliness. While Mrs. Poate was exchanging the sun-bonnet for the one she wore to church Sundays, in honour of the unusual event of taking a walk, the guest slipped a few shillings under a blue china mug on the mantel-piece, remembering Jasper's rule: "When I have I give, and when I need

I take, and pass it on to the next poor beggar down on his luck."

When the two women parted on the brow of the hill above the Great Pond at Alresworthy, they kissed as mother and daughter might have done.

## III.

THE forest was so dark that the solitary woman, walking along a narrow glade under the overarching boughs, felt afraid. She did not mind loneliness, but then she was used to the open country where the eye could travel away to the far horizon, and where, however overcast it might be, the whole wide sky was always full of light; these deep, mysterious thickets closing her round, these green glooms and heavy shadows filled her with an unreasoning dismay. Had it been dusk it would have seemed more natural, but the day was yet young. An hour or so ago she had been glad to turn out of the blazing August sunshine into the cool shade of the trees; it had seemed cheery enough with the flecks and splashes of golden light falling between the leaves, but now a brooding darkness stooped over the wood like the shadow of a great vulture.

So still it was, too. Though song-tide was past there had been a companionable cheeping and twittering among the birds, an indistinguishable murmurous hum of insect life, a rustle and stir where small creatures crept unseen through the covert of bracken and lady-fern. Did they all feel the same dismay that had seized upon her? They had fallen silent; not an insect stirred, not a leaf flickered, the earth held her breath.

Phenice chid herself for her forebodings and went valiantly forward. A woman who would tremble at shadows was no wife for Jasper.

A long rumble shook the forest and died away in ominous mutterings. She quickened her pace. This was no place to be caught in a thunderstorm. She was not timid, but she well knew the warnings of the countryside to keep from trees when lightning was about. Suppose one of these mighty oaks was to be riven where it stood, and fall upon her! She recalled many a tragic tale of such disaster.

What a long, long wood it was! Should she ever get to the end of it? A wind got up suddenly and ran shuddering past, turning up the undersides of the leaves for an instant; then came the hush again. A blinding glare and the momentary vision of every branch of oak, every frond of bracken outlined in flame, then the long, shaking roar, the sharp rattle as of musketry. Phenice sped on past the trees as if they were a rank of menacing giants. They were thinning at last; they fell back on the one hand and on the other, and before her stretched the road across the open heath.

One peril was behind her, but how venture into the open, where the rain was already falling like rods of steel? She looked round in hope of some house, some shed or linhay. Only one thing was in sight that might offer any shelter, a gipsy cart, a moving mass of wicker chairs, baskets, and mats, travelling leisurely along the road, and a few yards behind it a woman and a lean mongrel dog were trudging. The woman called out to someone inside and the cart

slackened; she was going to get in. If only Phenice could catch them up, perhaps they would take her into shelter, too. She ran faster, calling as she went: the woman saw her and beckoned her to hurry, and the cart pulled up again. Breathless she reached it, a long, brown hand was stretched out and clutched her, and she felt herself pulled up into safety and shelter, as she panted out:

"Oh, thank you so much! I was getting so wet."

"Very welcome, miss, I'm sure," said the woman who had pulled her in, and the cart jogged on again.

Phenice stumbled to a stool close by the door, and sat looking out between the hanging mats and baskets at the sheets of white rain that drifted past, at the beggarmen dancing up and down, at the brown pools all curdled at the edges that had already formed at the sides of the road; it was all that could be seen, for the rain was like a veil. Then she shook the drops from her hair and from the brim of her Tam-o'-Shanter, and, as her eyes got used to the dimness, she began to look about her. It was a snug little home into which she had so unceremoniously burst, about the size of an omnibus, rather inconveniently crowded with bundles and cooking utensils, and by no means so tidy as a ship's cabin, though the miniature window had the traditional clean curtains tied back with smart ribbons, and there was some attempt at adornment. There were patchwork cushions on the stools, and a patchwork quilt on the bed, and the walls were almost covered with gay-coloured prints, such as are to be bought at fairs. It did not, however, swarm

with inhabitants, as she expected; there seemed to be only two women, two or three children snuggled under the counterpane, and a man who was in front driving, with gold rings in his ears and a very short pipe in his mouth.

One of the women was rather pretty, black-haired and black-eyed, but in spite of her colouring she looked much less of a gipsy than the other, for she was dressed in a once smart double-breasted cloth jacket and a straw hat, gaping at the brim and trimmed with a faded red rose and a perfectly straight black ostrich feather. The one who had been walking was taller and looked older; she had a handsome, rather haggard face and hair of a dull, tawny hue under a yellow silk handkerchief. She wore huge heavy gold ear-rings and a thick gold ring on her finger. She walked, as Phenice had observed when she was following the cart, with an easy, swinging gait from the hips, like a man or like one who was used to travel afoot. Her large brown hands were busy, deftly manipulating long osiers, and as she worked she talked to her companion in a rapid, un-English tone, using many words that were strange to the listener. From their manner the two women seemed to be having some difference, but presently the younger appeared to think they were treating the guest with scant ceremony, for she broke off and turned to her:

"And where may you be going, miss?"

"To Lyndwood."

"Why, then, you've come wrong. You'd ought to have kept to the main road instead of turning off by Queechly bottom."

"But this will take me to Wilmer Lawn, where the pony fair is; won't it?"

"Oh, yes, it will take you there right enough, if that's where you're going; but you don't look much of a one for a fair." She laughed. "We are bound for that ourselves. You can come 'long of us, if you've a mind to."

"Thank you very much; I can pay you for it."

"So much the better. I want a new hat cruel bad. My man has been that lazy with the baskets we aint got many to sell. Them chairs outside belongs to his sister"—indicating the industrious figure in the corner with a nod. "And what takes you to Lyndwood Fair, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

The taller woman looked up from her work.

"For shame, Liz! What is it to you what she wants? The Romany does not ask questions of the stranger. You seem to have left your manners in the town."

Liz laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "No offence, miss, I hope: only 'tisn't a hiring mop, and I thought——"

"Shut up!" said the other. "She looks tired to death, poor soul, and so wet. Why can't you make her a cup o' tea, instead of jawin' at her?"

"Why, so I will. You'd like one, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, don't trouble," said Phenice. "I shall be all right."

"Not a bit of trouble! Besides we'll all have some. We had our dinner early, before my brother went on with the ponies. Here, you won't mind holding the baby a minute while I boil up the kettle?"

Phenice took the queer little bundle that was dumped into her lap, though she hardly knew how to hold it, it was so queerly swathed up in a red shawl like a miniature Egyptian mummy. She dandled it awkwardly enough while its mother whisked to and fro, setting light to the stove and putting out cups and saucers, as little incommoded by the lurching of the cart over the ruts as a ship's cook would be by the roll of his vessel. Fortunately, it was a good-natured infant and did not squall.

Presently, when Liz came close, to set the japanned cups on a sort of shelf that was let out from the wall, she observed, with a jerk of her thumb over her shoulder, "Pamela is sort o' queer, ye know. Her husband's in quod. Ikey there, my man, is her brother, and we'd ha' been main glad to have her stop long of us and share our cart, but she quarrelled with us on accounts of our goin' in the town to live, winter time. We sort o' patched it up, and she's come with us this journey, she and the little un—one o' them kids is hern—but she won't stop long. She don't hold with new ways; she thinks it's wicked for gipsies to do different to what they always have a-done, but law! times is different. Ikey and me, we've been to school, y' know, but Pamela, not she! She've never had a hat on her head, to my knowledge, all her days, and she can't so much as read and write, though she makes a heap more at the fortune-telling than what I do."

"Did you say her name was Pamela?"

Phenice put the baby back into its mother's arms and went to the other end of the cart. The tall gipsy

had laid down her basket-work and was standing in the doorway behind the driver, shading her eyes from the low sun which had burst out now the storm was spent, and was putting the whole wet world into a dazzle. A little ahead a small drove of rough ponies were trotting along, a gipsy lad riding the hindmost; their hoofs splashing through the puddles with a liquid sound.

The woman was looking out with an absorbed face; her soul was not in the cart: whether she were simply watching the ponies or whether it had travelled away beyond the sunset, Phenice could not tell. She touched her arm timidly.

"I think you may be able to help me," she said. "Your name is Pamela Stanley?"

The gipsy nodded. "What, then?"

"Do you know a man called Jasper? A man who plays the fiddle?"

"Do I know Jasper? And who may you be that ask? Are you Jasper's girl?"

Phenice made no answer to that question. "They told me he was sick," she said, "so I came: I could not stay away. But I don't know where to look for him. He had gone away from Alresworthy, where I thought to find him, and I don't know—perhaps he is all right again now."

"He was sick a while back; we found him when we came through Alresworthy. We had him here and nursed him up, but he was soon off again, and where he is now is more than I can say. He'll turn up likely at the Pony Fair."

That was just what Phenice had been looking to,

what in fact had brought her so far on her way, yet now she shrank.

"Oh, I don't think I'll go on," she said. "I thought perhaps he needed help. They told me—but never mind; he won't want me."

All the way she had been haunted by the vision of Jasper lying by the wayside, sick and untended, suffering as she had seen him suffer without a hand to aid, a voice to soothe; she had felt as if his need were drawing her away from her home, across the barriers of her woman's pride. Perhaps, after all, it was a delusion.

Pamela watched her for a minute. "You'd best come on," she said; "we'll find him."

Then Liz called to them from within to come and sit down to their tea. The cart was pulled up to the side of the road, and the horse taken out of the shafts to graze on the grassy margin, while the driver came and took his seat beside the shelf which served as a table. They had by this time overtaken the ponies, which had been driven on in a very leisurely manner, and suffered to stop and browse at their own sweet will, and the lad who had been in charge of them dismounted and joined the party. The two bigger children, who had been asleep on the bed, now woke and came forward to clamour for their share, and the little room, so to call it, was quite crowded, but with every blade of grass dripping and great pools standing by the roadside, not even a gipsy would care to take his meal under the hedge.

Pamela seemed to have taken Phenice under her wing; she took her hand and, drawing her forward,

performed an introduction that made her free of the company:

"This is Jasper's girl. You mind, where he was laid up ill so long that time."

Well, she was in for the adventure now, and must needs go through with it, come what might.

The halt over, they plodded on their way through the deepening dusk, across a high stretch of moorland where the sheets of wet cotton-grass gleamed like misty lakes, then downhill and through the darkling wood again, where the moon, peering through the boughs, caught her own reflection in the puddles broken into a thousand disks. Liz sat on the tail of the cart, nursing her baby and singing to it; a queer, low, croodling song, not one of those she had learned in the school she was so proud of, but something weird and unmeaning that mother and grandmother had sung before her, that perhaps had hushed gipsy babies on Hungarian Puszta or Russian Steppes many hundred years ago. The two other little ones had been laid on the bed again and, cuddled in one another's arms, were breathing soft and deep. It was hot and dark inside, and Pamela and Phenice sat on the ledge in front just behind the driver, and talked of Jasper.

"Can you live out o' doors winter and summer; can you tramp all day and sleep o' nights under the stars? Are you friends with the snow and the thunder?" asked Pamela, "or are you afraid?"

"I'm not afraid," answered Phenice; "those are not the sort of things that frighten me, and I'm never sick."

"He'll not work for you," Pamela went on, "nor yet make a home for you. You Gorgie women like to have a place of your own, and get things together, clothes and all sorts of little odd-come-shorts. I know you. I've been up and down amongst you, high and low, many a year. If you marry Jasper, you'll never have more than you can carry on your back."

"I know," said Phenice quietly. "If it was gear that I was caring for, I need never have come away from home."

"Well, you've been warned. And now let us look at your hand."

Phenice held it out, and the other took it in her strong brown fingers and turned it up, palm to the moonlight. She scrutinised it silently for a minute. Then she spoke in a rather dreamy inward tone, like a person who, while she speaks, is trying to see something a long way off.

"There isn't much past, and what there is of it is dim. Work and duty, loneliness and hunger: a long white road that you've been wanting to travel on: far back, behind all that, there is a sea-voyage."

"I never was at sea," put in Phenice; "though I often wished I could go a voyage. My father was a sailor; he was at sea when I was born."

"That's it," said Pamela, "and your mother's heart was there, too, I expect. The things that happened to yourself, and the things that happened before you was born and is written down upon your fate, gets mixed up sometimes."

"But it is the future I want you to tell me. Shall I find him?"

"Oh, yes, you'll find him and you'll wed him; your heart will rule your head. I see travel and trouble ahead,—but that's like enough,—and you'll go hungry all your days."

"Hungry?" said Phenice. "Well, I dare say I shall. I don't expect ever to be rich."

"Ah, but there's more than one sort of hunger."

"Why do you say that?"

"I don't know why. I see what I see, but I have nothing to do with the whys and the wherefores. If you are afraid to dree your weird, you can but turn back."

"And that is just what I can't do. I have no more power to turn back than if I were paralysed."

"I suppose so. I don't see you turning back."

"I wish," said Phenice after a long pause, "that you could tell me more. You haven't told me the one thing that fortune-tellers always say."

"And what may that be?"

"Don't you know? Whether he loves me."

"Ah! Well, one thing I can tell you, you never need to be jealous over Jasper; he will be true to you. I've known him ever since he was a boy, and I never knew him to hanker after any woman yet but yourself."

The cart was now turning off the road on to a piece of waste ground at the side, and, after jerking over a few ruts, came to an anchor under the hedge. Ikey, who had been sitting on the shaft to drive, dropped to the ground and began to undo straps and buckles, while the three women clambered down more slowly, glad to stretch their legs after the long, cramped sit-

ting. The ponies had already arrived and were tethered on the waste, while the lad in charge of them had lighted a bit of fire in a sheltered corner, and in its ruddy glow was hobnobbing with a couple of others of his own kind, who had appeared upon the scene.

Pamela was helping with the unharnessing, and Phenice walked forward a few steps by herself, wondering what she was to do next. The stopping place was just under the crest of a hill, and a little below them, half a mile or so, there seemed to be a village, low roofs clustered round a spire that showed dark against the pale sky. It was a clear night after the storm, and the moon lit up the confused outline, though the windows were already dark; villagers go betimes to bed. It did not look hospitable.

"I suppose I could get a bed down there?" she said doubtfully, turning back to the little friendly group round the cart.

Pamela was pulling a strap undone with her teeth and could not answer, but Liz spoke with a laugh.

"Bless your heart! They wouldn't take you in, coming in our cart. Since you come with us, you'd better bide: you are kindly welcome."

"You are very kind," she said doubtfully, "but have you room?"

"Well, we do look rather a crowd, but the men will sleep by the fire or underneath the cart, and the babies don't take up much room."

So Phenice made her first acquaintance with nomad life, and found it by no means to be despised; she sat with the rest round the wood fire and smelt the sa-

voury steam that went up from the cooking pot; she shared the meal that tasted no less savoury than it smelt, though the table service consisted of an iron spoon and a tin pan shared with Pamela; and presently she lay down to sleep on an extra mattress Liz put on the floor of the cart for her. She drew it close to the doorway that she might lie and watch the stars, for she thought she should never sleep in these strange surroundings, but she was weary with her long day, and the night wind fanned her softly, and when she opened her eyes the sun was high, and Pamela and Liz already on the ground outside, making breakfast ready.

## IV.

On the outskirts of the fair Phenice lingered, solitary, watching, not unamused with the bustle that went on round about her, in spite of the gnawing, anxious dread and doubtfulness that beset her. She had walked up with Pamela, but she did not want to go right into the throng. She did not in the least mind staying alone; her plain dress and quiet bearing attracted no attention. No one spoke to or molested her.

Threading her way in and out among the groups she could track the tall, commanding figure of the fortune-teller by the bright yellow head-kerchief and long gold ear-rings which caught the sunlight as she tossed her head; and now and again fragments of her predictions came to Phenice's ear in a sing-song voice, not without an occasional note of sarcasm in it. It seemed to be the usual hackneyed tale—a handsome husband for one pretty girl, a dangerous rival for another; gold, much gold for this one, a long voyage for that; love, luck or ill-luck, and so forth through the whole gamut. Phenice could hardly recognise her, her white teeth gleaming with an insinuating smile, for the same as the grave, sad-eyed woman who had sat beside her last night, had looked so earnestly into her hand, and told her in low, dreamy tones of the

dim things that lay before her. Well, it was a trade, like another.

It was a very different scene from October Lamb Fair at Dronechester, where the poor sheep were penned in small muddy spaces at the bottom of the broad High Street, and the booths stood all along the pavement. There were booths here, too, of course, and shows and giddy-go-rounds, and all the concomitants of a country gathering, but they stood in the shade of the trees at the edge of the lawn, and in the wide inclosure were the ponies with their rough, shaggy coats, their wild eyes, their manes and tails untrimmed, flying in the breeze; panting, shy, frightened, but very unlike the huddled stupefaction of the sheep. A great space in the midst was left clear for trying their paces, and here one and another was led out, mounted generally by a gipsy boy, and trotted, walked, or galloped round. Close about this circle stood an inner ring of would-be purchasers; dealers, farmers, gentlemen's coachmen from the country houses round, and all the riff-raff that invariably collects round about any manner of horse-flesh. Phenice got tired presently of trying to see over their heads, and moved away.

She hardly knew why she was there, and yet she lingered. She left the finding of Jasper, if he was to be found, entirely to Pamela. She was tired, she wanted to go home, and she had no home to go to but a gipsy cart in which she was but an intruder.

Presently she found a grassy bank under the shade of some beech trees, a little away from the crowd and bustle of the fair. She sat down there and dined

lightly on some gingerbread and "pop" she bought at one of the outlying stalls, and thought over her position. She would not stay; on that she was resolved; she must just wait and thank Pamela for her goodness and tell her she had changed her mind, and then go on her way again. Not home; ah, never home again, but to find work somewhere where she could live alone and forgotten. She had been mad to come. He was not ill; he did not need her. Those had been lying visions of hers.

So musing, she leaned her back against the stalwart trunk of a beech tree and stayed so quiet she nearly fell asleep. Was she asleep? Was she dreaming? or was that the lilt of a tune she knew? She got up and went back to the outskirts of the crowd. There in one corner the people seemed drawn together in a knot; the music had gathered them up as a magnet gathers steel beads. She could see nothing, they stood so thick; she could only hear the wild, swaying rhythm of the Hungarian dance music that no one but Jasper could play like that.

Almost against her will her feet drew nearer and nearer, till a sudden fear fell on her. What if the crowd parted and he should see her? What would he think? Was not that the very thing she sought; that she had come all this weary way for? Yet at the notion she fled away, nor turned nor paused till she had gained the shelter of Ikey's cart.

It was close in there and dark, out of the August sunshine, but the very innermost depths were hardly dark enough to hide her from the daylight, from Jasper, from herself. She sat on the bed, her face

buried in her hands, and the slow afternoon hours wore away.

The sun got lower till the level beams slanted in between the trees, right into the narrow doorway and touched her bent head, but she never raised it. She became conscious presently of a shadow in the doorway; Pamela stood peering in.

"Why, here you are! And me seeking you high and low, all up and down the fair! Why ever didn't you say you was going back? Why, what's the matter with the girl? Why don't you speak?"

Then she turned to someone outside. "Come your ways in, if you like. Here she is, but she seems gone silly. What, lad, you're not shy!"

Another step crossed the narrow space: he was standing close before her.

"What, Phenie?"

The voice her ear had hungered for, the voice that had echoed like lost music through her life these many months, seemed to break the spell that kept her huddled away from him, huddled away from the light. She looked up at him. Yes, it was the same familiar figure, lithe and spare, yet wiry-looking and as full of health as she had ever seen him. His brown eyes were fixed on her with an expression half wistful, half farouche; just the look of a wild creature to whom you are offering something he longs for, yet fears to take.

This was not how she had pictured their meeting. Desperation gave her courage. She rose from the bed and pushed back the matted hair that had fallen over her forehead,

"It is hot," she said, "and I got so tired dragging about through the fair I had to come back and rest me a bit. I didn't see you there, but I fancied one time I heard you playing."

"Ay; one of our old tunes. Did you remember? But it wanted the harp; it never sounds the same to me now without those arpeggios. Did you bring it?"

"What, the harp? No; how could I?"

A look of perplexity clouded his eyes at the unwonted sharpness of her tone. "No, of course not; it was a stupid question."

"Won't you sit down?" she went on stiffly. "I am glad to see you looking so well, Mr. Jasper. We heard at home you had been laid up with the fever and rheumatics again."

"I did have a touch of it. Phenie, did you come because I was sick?"

"Oh, well," she answered tranquilly, though the thick beating of her heart was like to strangle her, "I thought mayhap you'd die with no one to see after you. But that was all nonsense; you don't want a nurse. I am going home to-morrow."

"No, I don't want a nurse, but I do want my comrade. Do you mind what I said to you that morning up on the Old Beacon? Well, I've been trying to get far enough off to break that tie, but it will not break; the whole world isn't wide enough to part you and me. Next week I am going to Broussa. Will you come?"

And Phenice stood up and put her hands in his.

## V.

No apprehensive gloom lurked in the forest glades for Phenice in the glowing August morning, as she stepped along the green alleys under the dappled shade. Was it because the hot sunshine filtered through the dense, leafy boughs overhead and fell upon the pathway with splashes of liquid gold? Was it because the sloping glades and hollows, where the trees and undergrowth fell back, were filled with green light as a cup is filled with wine; or because the thickets were all astir with life? Was it because the brooding shadow of the storm was all dispersed; or because one walked beside her whose mere presence filled the whole world with content?

They were not talking, and Phenice walked as one in a dream. Jasper strode on a little ahead, yet never forgetful of her, for, when the path narrowed, he never failed to catch and hold aside the trailing branches, that they might not entangle her gown. Now and then she stopped to pull long trails of bindweed or ropes of honeysuckle.

"What are you going to do with these?" he asked presently, as he stopped to reach down a branch of clematis she was straining after.

"I don't know, I'm sure. I never thought of it. Poor things! Yet I always feel they like to be picked, like girls sitting round waiting to be asked to dance."

He laughed. "Well, I am afraid they'll die unwed. I have no vases in my establishment."

They had been walking nearly all the morning: it seemed limitless, this great, silent wood—a world of itself, apart from the real one where men toiled for bread or struggled for mastery or flung themselves against stone walls of perplexity and unanswered riddles. Here Nature opened wide her hand and filled all things living with plenteousness, and one might sooner expect to meet the little Good People of the nursery legends than the weary toil-worn folk of this workaday world.

Sometimes the way broadened to a green drove, then a rutty cart-track crossed a sweep of upland clothed with gorse and ling, then the dense woodland again with the narrow grass-grown way. Phenice had no idea whither they were bound; Jasper was used to travelling his own road without explanations, and she offered neither question nor comment.

Presently came a gate, the pathway became a lane, wheelmarks appeared suggesting a road which led somewhither; then as they turned a corner where the hill grew steeper, before them on a knoll, wrapped round with the forest, in the very depths of the green solitudes stood a church, so ancient, so weather-worn, so stained with lichen and draped with ivy, that it seemed rather part of the natural growth around it than the work of men's hands. The red brick of which it was built had faded to a dim, mottled sandstone colour, dappled here and there with moss like the trunk of an aged tree; the tower, squat and broad, wrapped in century-old ivy, was hardly to be distin-

guished from the lofty surrounding elms; the roof came low, and the graveyard, piled with the dead of long years, rose almost to the window ledges and overtopped the inclosing crumbled wall.

Jasper paused with his hand upon the wicket gate, which gave upon four steep flagged steps up to the pathway.

"This is where we will be married," he said. "Would you like to go inside?"

Phenice assented and followed him up the path. Contrary to the usual custom of English country churches the solid oak door stood open. Inside one could still fancy one's self in the heart of the forest, for it was filled with a cool, dim green light that made the worn, uneven flags, damp-stained in places, and with tiny ferns sprouting between them, look like the floor of the woodland rides: the worm-eaten pews were rough-hewn out of thick slabs of oak, and all the silence was murmurous with insect hummings, dripping water, air stirring softly between the leaves.

The walls had been frescoed in some long-past day, and here and there showed a half-lost outline of sweeping wings, bending forms, haloed heads. It was all ancient and shabby, yet not neglected, for above the altar hung a small red lamp, that gleamed like the setting sun peering through forest glades.

Jasper had certainly not been a church-goer at Hampage: indeed Phenice hardly knew whether he ever did go to church, yet here he bent his knee with a devoutness she was unused to see. She followed softly up the aisle and knelt for a few minutes in one of the pews, wondering if it was true; if she should

really stand beside him at that altar to plight their troth. The thought of it gave her comfort and security.

"What a strange place for a church," she said as they came out.

"Yes, and it is an odd thing, like so many forest churches it is dedicated to the Holy Angels. I have come across them in all parts of the world: in the Ardennes and, I think, in the Black Forest; and I remember a wonderful tiny chapel of the Angels in the midst of a cork wood in Spain."

"It seems so queer to put a church in such a lonesome spot. Wherever do the people come from?"

"Oh, they come from all the little farms and lodges here and there, and stable their beasts in that shed you can see down there between the trees; besides, there are a couple of hamlets within a mile or so on either hand. They say it was standing before Doomsday Book was made, before ever the land was afforested. It may be; I don't know."

For about a mile they followed the woodland path, which by degrees emerged into something more like an ordinary road; then came a small clearing with a half-dried duckpond, and a field where a few cows and rough ponies were grazing. Just beyond stood a low house, not much more than a rambling cottage, half smothered with purple clematis which embraced the very chimneys. Jasper pushed open the gate and entered with the air of a man at home. Round about was an old-fashioned garden, with gooseberry bushes and ranks of vegetables on one side and a long bowling-green on the other. An old mulberry tree had a

little square grass-plat all to itself in the very middle of the kitchen garden, and on a sunny space of lawn, just clear of the shadow of the house, stood a grey sundial.

Far down one of the grassy walks that intersected the bean-rows a rusty black skirt, clothing a stooping form, could be descried between the sticks. Jasper pursued the path, sending his voice before him:

"Hullo, padre! You did not expect to see me?"

Phenice lingered beside the sundial, whose gnomon was just beginning to cast its shade on the after side of noon. There was a half-effaced, moss-grown inscription, and she tried to trace it with her finger:

UMBRA FUGIT LUX PERMANET,

or,

FUGIT LUX PERMANET UMBRA.

Which was it? There were no stops, and it ran right round the pedestal; but it was in Latin, so she would not be much the wiser, wherever she began.

She looked up from her task in a minute to find Jasper close to her, and beside him, not the old woman she thought had been weeding the beans, but an old priest in a cassock, short but upright and alert, with a quick glance and a ruddy, wholesome face. He was rubbing a pair of very brown hands together, trying to get rid of the earth with which they were coated.

"I have a job for you, padre," Jasper was saying. "This is my wife that is to be, and we want you to tie the knot."

"God bless my soul!" He gave his right hand

another rub on his cassock and took Phenice's into a kindly clasp. "Why, this rather takes my breath away. Jasper, of all people, to range himself!"

"But I have no intention to range myself, if by that you mean shelve myself. She is going to step out into the wide world with me."

The old man looked into her face with shrewd, inquiring, kindly eyes.

"She is a bold woman," he said. "Well, well, we can't tie the knot here and now on the grass-plat. Come you indoors; dinner will be ready directly, and then we will talk."

"Jasper married!" he kept muttering to himself, as he preceded them into the house.

He led them into a low room, with a wide window looking on to the bowling-green. It was walled with books from floor to ceiling, and pervaded with the deliciously suggestive smell of old leather, not unmingled with a hint of tobacco. Jasper crossed straight to the shelves and pounced upon a volume.

"What! You have got that Plantin edition of 'Marco Polo,' after all? Where did you pick him up?" And diving into the midst, he was in a moment perfectly oblivious of Phenice and of his errand.

She sat down in a wooden elbow-chair over against the window, and looked out across the bowling-green to the lanes between the bean-sticks. The scarlet blossoms tossed idly in the wind, and her thoughts tossed idly with them. This must be a dream in which she had been walking through the forest beside Jasper, and presently she would cross the sea with him, still in a dream, and wander by long, white roads

into the wide world. Or would the dream break? Should she break it herself? Should she get upon her feet and say: "It is a mistake; I must go home?" Home? She had shut the door of home behind her for good and all.

Someone was speaking to her, and she turned with an effort from the swaying red blossoms outside.

A small old woman stood at her elbow, looking at her curiously; her grey hair was tucked into a black chenille net, and she wore a coarse apron with a bib.

"You'd like to step upstairs, m'm, and take off your hat? Shall I show you the way?"

The dream, it seemed, was to go on. The old woman led the way with little, trotting steps, up a narrow, twisting staircase and along a matted passage into a dimly lighted room. Crossing it, she drew up the blind and let the light stream in on an old-fashioned, unused-looking bedroom, furnished with mellow-toned Indian chintz with a curious pattern of long-tailed birds and large-leaved creepers, and, pulling open a drawer that smelt of cedar, laid out a brush and comb of carved ivory. Phenice stood a moment, resting her hand upon the table. Were these the sort of things one offered to a tramp woman to whom one gave a meal? Her eyes were full of questions, but the old servant stood primly beside the wash-stand with a clean, fine towel over her arm, and offered no remark.

Phenice unpinned her loosened brown hair and combed it out over her shoulders. Then one of the many questions found voice.

"Is your master a Roman Catholic priest?"

"Bless your heart, no, ma'am! Master is the rector of the parish."

"Oh, I didn't know; he dresses oddly, and then he —Mr. Jasper, I mean—called him 'padre.'"

"Oh, that! Well, you see, m'm, master has been a chaplain in India for many a year before he come here, and I take it that's what they call 'em out in them heathen countries. Leastways the gentlemen that come to see him from foreign parts always do. As to the cassock, why, there's a good few wears them; though I'll not deny"—in a sudden burst of candour —"I do not like to see a gentleman in petticoats myself."

"He seems wonderfully kind."

"Kind! Ah, you may say so! There's a many come to him from far and near when they want help of all sorts. They call him the gipsy's parson hereabouts, and many a gipsy wedding have we had in that little church you saw on the hill as you come by."

"Do they come to church, then, the gipsies?"

She shook her head. "They come to be married and to be buried, and whiles to christen their brats. Master have got 'em that far; elsewise they worship God their own fashion—if they do worship Him. But master aint lived among the heathen for nothing: he knows how to talk to 'em. Now, ma'am, you'd like a little hot water? 'Tis more refreshing, in the warm weather."

Phenice accepted her ministrations gratefully, wondering how long it would be before she poured warm water into a wide china basin again. Wondering, too, whether this old woman would be able to throw any

light on the mystery she was about to wed. Was Jasper a gipsy *protégé?* His manner was more like that of a son of the house. Her eyes asked a hundred things, but her lips framed no question. She gave her smooth hair a final touch and said she was ready to go downstairs.

Meanwhile the padre had turned upon his guest, and was catechising him much as he might have catechised a truant schoolboy.

"Now, Jasper, have you run away with her?"

No answer but an indistinct murmur.

The large brown hands forcibly closed the ancient and fascinating volume and replaced it firmly upon the shelves. Jasper's hazel eyes looked as if he had newly returned from a far country and could not find himself.

"Oh, but I say! That is a treasure! You somehow realise the glory of it so much more in an old edition like that, handling the very leaves that have been fingered by men who thought——"

The padre's ruddy face grew redder.

"Will you leave 'Marco Polo' alone and attend to the matter in hand? Do you suppose I am going to marry you at your bare request—over a broomstick?"

"Oh, about Phenice; yes? What was it you asked me?"

"Did you run away with her?"

"Certainly not. She came of her own free will."

"What were her people thinking about to trust a harum-scarum like you?"

"Her people had not much to say to it; I need

hardly tell you they did not like it or me. It was a year and a half ago; I was laid up there ill, and she nursed me. We saw the impossibility of it, and I came away. But somehow—it won't do: she was breaking her heart, and I—well, I keep coming back, coming back like a moth to the flame. It is no good. Why shouldn't we wander together, since that is what she chooses?"

"Can you take care of her in your rambling life?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "She isn't afraid; ask her."

At that moment she entered, modest, quiet, neat, her brown hair brushed back above her ears, no trace of shyness or self-consciousness in her manner.

"I will ask her presently," said her host, and hastened to place a chair for her.

Later, when Jasper had betaken himself to the garden with his pipe, the padre stood looking down at Phenice in an incredulous perplexity. A gipsy wench he would have understood; he was used to them. On the other hand, his early experiences had given him some insight into the unexpected ways of the smart woman, as India develops her. A wild hoyden, who had flung off the trammels of an uncongenial home to roam the world with Jasper, could have been dealt with; but this woman, who moved and spoke so softly, who was so self-possessed in all her ways, puzzled him infinitely more by her very ordinariness.

He stood before her with his thumbs in the broad waistband of his cassock.

"So you think to straighten this crooked stick,"

he said. "I wonder, do you know at all what you have undertaken?"

Phenice did not reply: a small smile stole round the corners of her mouth. She preferred her stick just as it was.

"Do you expect to make this wild fellow settle down?"

"No, sir."

"Then what do you expect?"

"To live as he lives, sir; I like a roving life."

"Pshaw! A woman brought up as I can see you have been! It is monstrous! If he must needs wed, he should have wed a gipsy."

"You are mistaken, sir, if you take me for a fine lady. I've been brought up to work and to be out all weathers, and I am strong."

"Humph! And your people? What do they say to it?"

"I have no parents; my grandfather brought me up; but I am six-and-twenty. Surely my life is my own."

"I suppose so. You are too—reasonable for me." A very unclerical adjective hovered on the tip of his tongue and was bitten off short. He took a turn through the room and came back to her.

"Well, will you stay here with Mrs. Blake till the license is got? She will look after you."

"Thank you, I would rather stay with Pamela Stanley. She has got a tent of her own now, not very far from here. I said I would go back to her."

. . . . .

"Jasper," said the padre, "that wife of yours will

turn you round her little finger. I shall see you a staid member of society yet."

. . . . .

The wedding night seemed to Phenice like a journey into the moon. She was at sea for the first time in her life. She sat in the bows, nestled against Jasper; his arm holding her close, the same rug wrapped round them both. Far ahead the great golden disk hung low, and the prow of the vessel seemed to burst into the broad, shining pathway; flinging a mass of glittering foam this way and that. The high stars swung above them as the horizon dipped and rose. Jasper's soft voice in her ear told her of the life that lay before her; of the long walk across sunny France, of the Mediterranean, Naples, Sicily; then the Greek Islands and the Eastern land of dreams.

## *BOOK V.*

## SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT.

Of all the meals you can buy for money,
Give me a meal of bread and honey!

A table of grass in the open air,
A green bank for an easy chair,

The table-cloth in-wrought with flowers,
And a grass-hopper clock to tick the hours.

—*Richard le Gallienne.*

Petrels of the sea-drift!
Swallows of the lea!
Arabs of the whole wide girth
Of the wind-encircled Earth!
In all climes we pitch our tents,
Cronies of the elements;
With the secret lords of birth
Intimate and free.

—*Bliss Carman.*

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing;
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another;
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.

—*Longfellow.*

## I.

THE little brook came babbling down from the bare hills above, chattering to itself of all the marvellous things it meant to do and see on its way to the distant ocean. It hurried through a narrow channel hemmed in with boulders which made it murmur complaints, overshadowed with a dense thicket of live-oak and holly draped with old-man's-beard, and set round with tall lady-fern. Here it had to make a downward leap, parted into three crystal threads between the rocks, to a broad stone, worn hollow like a basin, where it spluttered and went foaming on its way. Lower down the thicket opened out, a few graceful birches stood bowing on either hand like ladies in waiting, and the brook, now grown proud, slackened its pace and broadened into a pool, brown and clear as amber.

Up by the miniature cascade sat Phenice on a rock, dabbling her bare feet, and letting the water splash on them while she combed out her long, brown hair. It made an ideal lady's bower; she seldom had so fair a dressing-room. Presently she heard sounds, distant yet seeming loud, coming into the hush of that quiet place. She could distinguish the trampling of heavy feet, shouting, and the cracking of a whip. She withdrew her feet hastily from the water, shook the drops off them, and tucked them under her red petti-

coat, while with her left hand she gathered her hair into a knot.

Two blackbirds and a thrush had been chanting matins in the thicket; they broke off in the middle, and one of the blackbirds flew out in an hysterical fuss, but the brook went babbling on, unheeding interruption. Certainly the noise was coming nearer. Presently a large dark bulk filled up the clear space where the birches stood round, and a splashing of water, as one were beating it with clubs, made itself heard.

Phenice looked, rubbed her eyes, and looked again. There stood a large elephant, flapping wide ears and looking at her with little wicked eyes; a smaller one followed at a quick trot, chortling in his joy as he reached the water; and then another big one with a black man sitting on his neck, who slipped nimbly to the ground. She called to Jasper, but he had gone down-stream to look for a pool deep enough to bathe in, and after all she supposed they were tame enough; they probably belonged to some travelling show. She began to put on her shoes and stockings leisurely.

Meanwhile the first one was drawing up water in his trunk with much puffing and blowing, and pouring it systematically over his back. Soon six or eight piebald horses arrived on the scene, and a spotted dog. There was a good deal of pushing and shoving, for the horses did not like drinking where the elephants had stirred up the sand and gravel with their feet, and all came crowding up-stream. Phenice decidedly objected to this invasion of her dressing-room, and ordered them back with a hazel switch. She was used

enough in old days to driving horses and cattle, though she had never tried her hand upon elephants before.

She secured the breakfast from the inquisitive nose of the spotted dog by putting it up the fork of a tree, and presently Jasper came sauntering back from his bath, accompanied by a short man whom Phenice found it difficult to classify at sight. Something about his legs savoured of the stables, while a jaunty air of departed fashion hung about the curly brim of his hat; a patronising assurance strove with a certain deprecating good nature, and an assumed jocularity attempted to pierce through the depression of ill-success.

This person appeared rather embarrassed at the sight of Phenice, standing tall and straight under a birch-tree, her long hair now wound into a shining knot in the nape of her neck, which the sunlight, filtering between the boughs, burnished to gold. He dropped a few paces behind.

"Wife, this is Mr. Perrownick—of Perrownick's Performing Ponies, you know. It seems he is in difficulties, and I think we may be able to help him. Have you got some breakfast ready?"

"In a minute it will be; I've been a little hindered," with a glance at the spotted dog, who was fawning on the newcomer.

"Down, Cuffy, down!" cried the latter. "Hie, Peter! you take them beasts back. Don't you see you're disturbing the lady?"

"Oh, please don't send them away," said Phenice. "They are so enjoying themselves, poor dears! I like

to see them. Only I was afraid just now they were coming up among the breakfast things."

The kettle, on a fire of sticks, was already almost on the boil, and she was setting forth her supplies; a long, brownish French loaf, and a bundle of cold sausages.

"We've only one knife and mug," she remarked in an undertone to Jasper.

"Never mind. I'll cut yours, and you shall have the mug first."

She turned to the visitor. "It is all ready now. Will you come and sit down?" She indicated the mossy bank beside her as a hostess might point to a sofa, and rather shyly Mr. Perrownick took up a position on the very edge of it and laid aside the grass-blade he had been nibbling.

The cup difficulty having been overcome by Mr. Perrownick producing a horn mug of his own, Phenice poured out tea with an air, while Jasper cut thick slices of alternate bread and sausage.

"It seems," said the latter presently, when this business was disposed of, "that our friend has had some little difficulty with his band on the question of salary. Times, I understand, have been bad lately for showmen, consequently the band, finding their money in arrears, rather hastily adopted the course of taking boat for England, leaving our friend, as you might say, in a cleft stick. He has a performance announced for this evening at Morlaix, and either he must abandon it to a great loss or have it without music—which is not to be thought of. Now shall we give him an overture and a few interludes? What do you say?"

Phenice turned wondering, questioning eyes upon her husband for a moment, without speaking. Was he in earnest? Did he really mean it? Was she to play her mother's harp in a circus? What would grandad and Andrew have said! She met his brown eyes looking into hers, candid, simple: he certainly was not joking.

"Well, wife, would you rather leave him in his dilemma?"

"No, I am sorry. I will do what you wish. Only" —with a deprecating look—"not in the procession, need we?"

He laughed. "No, not in the procession. The harp is hardly a processional instrument."

Perrownick struck in: "Oh, as to that, black Peter can roll the drum well enough as we go through the streets. He shall march on ahead in a scarlet uniform, and the elephants will follow him like lambs. I should like you to see it, ma'am; 'tis a pretty sight, I do assure you. Well, there! I don't know how to thank you, I'm sure, for your condescension. Anybody can see 'tisn't a travelling show as you've been used to."

"I've not been used to any show at all," she said, as she held out her hand for the guest's cup to refill. "I come from the country."

"Ah, do you now? And so do I. I'm a Dorset man myself. My home was on a little farm, up Charminster way; but Lord! farm work was deadly dull, and when Perrownick's come our way I up and after it. I begun life cleaning out the lion's cages and setting up the tent and so forth, but I worked my way up, and when I married Perrownick's daughter I took

the name. I'd like you to meet Mrs. Perrownick,"—with a burst of enthusiasm,—" as fine a woman as ever you see upon a bare-backed steed, but,"—with a sigh,—" she's grown a bit too fleshy for the hoops, now."

" I dare say I shall see her to-night at the performance," said Phenice politely.

" If you'll step down early, I'll be proud to introduce you, and to the Freeling Family also; five of them, very accomplished young persons. They aint been with me very long. I look to them to pull us up a bit." He rose from the mossy sofa. " And now I'll be going on my way, for there's a deal to see to. Our camp is in a field littleways this side of the town; you can't mistake it. My grateful thanks to you both. And you'll not fail me?" He looked wistfully at Phenice.

" No, we'll not fail. My husband is always as good as his word. We'll be sure to come."

The curly-brimmed hat went off with a flourish, and the jaunty air had quite regained the upper hand as Mr. Perrownick walked away, closely followed by the spotted dog.

She was washing up cup and spoon when she felt a soft touch on her hair. Jasper had put up one knee on the bank behind her.

" Are you always going to be as good as you have been this morning?" he asked.

" I don't know. It is queer, but I think I half like it—with you."

She put up her lips to him.

## II.

It was already almost dark when Jasper and Phenice, descending from the stretch of moorland which forms the lowest slopes of the Montaignes d'Arrées where they had made their last night's encampment, after following a path that led now through tangled thickets, now by stepping-stones across a boggy patch, found themselves approaching a dusty field abutting on the high-road just outside the quaint old town of Morlaix.

Flares of naphtha lighted up the entrance where the audience had already begun to collect. Funny little broad-faced French children, hand in hand, were chattering away, much to Phenice's amusement, for she had not yet come to regard it as natural that little children should speak French; women from the villages round in white caps and long gold ear-rings jostled women from the Morlaix shops in fashionable hats and tight-fitting jackets; men in blue blouses gaped open-mouthed at the amazing pictures with which the outside of the vans forming the ring were adorned, whereon elephants having tea-parties and young ladies, gorgeous in muslin and spangles, flying through hoops, were attractively depicted.

Jasper, shouldering the harp, pushed his way between them, his wife following him closely. The doors were not yet open, but presently they caught

sight of their friend of the morning, got up as ring-master with a long whip, and Jasper signed to him.

"Mounseers and madams, permetty entry le music sivooplay!" exclaimed Mr. Perrownick, hastening forward to clear a passage. "Step this way, if you please. Very good of you to come, I'm sure."

So saying, he led the way round to the back of the field where horses and elephants were tethered by the hedge, till he reached a low tent, which looked like a cavern as he held back the curtain and signed them to enter.

"Thanks," said Jasper; "I think I'll stop outside and have a smoke, if you have no objection." He handed his pouch to their guide.

Phenice would fain have stayed outside, too, but thought it her duty to go in and be presented to Mrs. Perrownick. That lady was discovered in company with another matron, the strings of whose bonnet were cast over her shoulders and tied behind, darning stockings in close proximity to a paraffin lamp. The tent seemed filled with a mixed multitude; the Freeling Family, already attired in tights and spangles, were lying about in graceful, if unconstrained, attitudes on various cushions of straw, except one who was very busy painting his face by the aid of an extremely small handglass, which one of his sisters held up; the far end was wholly filled up by the bulk of a large elephant with a very little one beside it. Two or three small children, rolling on the floor, were putting bits of biscuit into the trunk of the bigger one as it waved majestically to and fro.

"Here, let me find you a stool, miss, or some'at to

sit upon," cried Mrs. Perrownick, hospitably welcoming the vistor. "We're a bit crowded in here to-night for Euphemia's calf has caught cold, so I was forced to let her stop in here 'long of us, and she do take up a deal o' room, but the children's pleased, anyway."

Phenice took her seat upon a bundle of straw which one of the Freelings politely rolled forward, and as her eyes became accustomed to the uncertain light, began to take in details. Mrs. Perrownick's form had certainly outgrown the capacities of any ordinary hoop, and indeed to conceive her flying through the air required a strong effort of imagination. She took a darning needle from her ample velvet bosom where she had stuck it for safety, and resumed her mending.

"Have you been long in France?" inquired Phenice, finding that the onus of conversation rested upon her.

"A couple o' months pretty nigh, and when we shall get away again is more than I can tell. 'Twas a fool's job coming; you may guess what it costs to ship a lot like this over, but Perrownick he heard tell as there was a deal to be made this side the water, and at home a travelling show don't draw like it used to in my poor father's time. There's more doin' in the towns, and the country folks gets into town easier; but law! them that told him 'twas any use coming over here was making a fool of him—and I will say for Perrownick, that's easy done; he understands taking care of the beasts, but business! Law! He aint got no head for business. But there!"—cutting off her thread with a snap—"I must be going to take the money at the

doors, or Perrownick will be letting it all run through his pockets."

When Mrs. Perrownick's tongue had ceased Phenice became aware of a sound she had vaguely noticed before and had fancied proceeded from the baby elephant; now she was sure it was distinctly the moaning of some person in pain, broken with an occasional gasp. She bent forward and tried to see through the gloom.

"Is anyone ill?" she asked of the nearest Freeling.

A spangled form raised itself slightly on an elbow. "It is only my brother; he gave himself a twist yesterday. I don't think it is much. My sister Sal wanted to rub him, but he won't let anyone go near him."

"Mayn't I go and see if I can do anything for him?"

"If you like; he is down at the end there."

The suffering acrobat, like a wounded animal, had withdrawn himself into the furthest corner of the tent, behind the huge elephant, where he could moan to himself undisturbed. Phenice slipped past the waving trunk, not without some trepidation, and bent over him.

"Are you hurt?" she asked in her soft, friendly voice. "Can't I do anything for you?"

"Oh, don't!" was the only answer, with a shrinking motion of the shoulder nearest her. "Leave me alone."

"I won't touch you; but you ought to be seen to. Isn't anyone looking after you?"

"Oh, they wanted to rub me with the oils. That's

what we do for everything, you know; but I can't be touched. Just let me be."

She stood a moment looking down at the slender, boyish figure in tights and spangled sash. "Why," she cried, "you're never going on? You couldn't!"

"No, it's no good. I got dressed somehow, and then it came on again."

She slipped past the elephant once more and out into the dusky field; it was quiet here at the back, for everyone had gone to the other end where the spectators were filing in. A moving spark under the hedge at last caught her eye. "Jasper!" she called softly.

In a moment he was beside her. "What is it, wife? Anything wrong? How are you getting on with the Freeling Family?"

"I wish you'd come in a minute. There's one of them hurt, and I don't know what to do for him."

He slipped in after her, quick and quiet as a shadow, and knelt down beside the patient. Something in his touch, in the swift sureness of it, made the boy submit to handling without a protest.

"I think he has only sprained a muscle," said Jasper after a rapid examination, "but it is an awfully painful thing to do. I was afraid at first there might be a rib broken. Can you put on a hot fomentation, Phenie? Get them to give you some turps. How did it happen?" he continued, while she went obediently and commandeered the rest of the Freeling Family to supply her requirements.

"Why, it was in the pyramid, don't you know: I'm top but one; my little sister jumped short, and reach-

ing after her I ricked myself and came to the ground. I didn't feel it so much till after. Are you a doctor?"

"A bit of a one in the desert, or when need so requires."

"However did you come here? You're an Englishman, aren't you?"

"Oh, we're the music, just for the nonce. How is it now?"

The boy was evidently easier, since he had begun to notice things outside his pain. Phenice was busily wringing out hot flannels, quite oblivious of her part in the coming performance, when Perrownick bustled in.

"Hullo! wherever have you all got to? The people's all in and time for the music to strike up. Nothing the matter with the lady, I do hope!" as he caught a glimpse of the group behind Euphemia.

"It is my brother," said the leading Freeling. "It is that wrench he give himself; he can't possibly play to-night; we must make up some figures without him."

The unlucky Perrownick put up both hands to his head and, catching each side of his hair, appeared to try and lift himself up by it like Mr. Pocket in moments of perplexity.

"Now I put it to you," he said, addressing no one in particular, "was there ever such an unfortunate individual as myself? First my band strikes, then my second clown levants; as if that wasn't enough, Euphemia, the most tractable of all my beasts, goes and has a calf and won't leave it to go in the ring; and as if that wasn't enough, the Freeling Family, as I was placing all my hopes on, goes to pieces, and the only

one of 'em I could rely on to do second clown breaks himself in two. And now it seems the music chooses to sit all the evening by his sick bed. Oh, go on; go on! I suppose I must give 'em all their money back."

"Oh, we're quite ready to begin!" said Jasper coolly. "I suppose Mrs. Perrownick can take my wife's place here? Come on, Phenie!"

"Oh, I say!" said the patient, "I'm d——d sorry, Mr. Perrownick. I could get up presently and do second clown in the donkey act. I needn't change, I could slip the spotted blouse on over these togs. If I howl, it 'll make 'em laugh a d——d sight more."

"Not you," said the elder brother. "I'll do second clown."

"Will you?" said Mr. Perrownick with another desperate tug at his hair. "Not if I know it! Why you aint got a joke in the whole of your long carcase, nor yet can't see one if it is pointed out at you end on."

"Leave it to me, Mr. Perrownick; I'll see you through," said Jasper as he held back the tent curtain for his wife to pass out. "Hurry, Phenie! The people are beginning to be impatient." For a stamping of feet on loose rickety boards was heard.

A queer smell saluted Phenice as she stepped to the edge of the ring where her harp had been placed; a prevailing odour of sawdust and of beasts, touched here and there with tobacco, with absinthe, and with anisette. It almost stifled her, and her hands were cold and trembled as she tightened the strings of her harp, keeping her eyes bent on them, for she was almost afraid to look up at the ring of impatient faces above the sawdust.

Yet no sooner did Jasper draw his bow across the strings than she felt that he had gripped his audience. In a moment they were whirled away from their prejudices, swept from their critical attitude, tuned, as the strings had been tuned, so that when the first batch of performing ponies trotted on under Mr. Perrownick's own command, they were greeted with a storm of applause that made them prick up their ears and paw the sawdust with quite an air.

It was different when Jasper, after a few whispered words of instruction, had slipped from her side to don his clown's attire, and she had to keep the audience in good humour by herself. Something of his spirit animated her, however, and she kept on as loudly and valiantly as she could till First Clown, leading a donkey by the bridle, set her free to watch for Jasper. The clown had to do some fooling by himself first, then suddenly someone behind her said something in French very distinctly, which was greeted with a roar of amusement, and she turned to see, not the expected clown in baggy garments and triangular red cheeks, but a lanky figure, scarlet from head to foot, with a scarlet hood and two little horns, standing shrugging his shoulders, and turning out the palms of his hands in exaggerated mockery of the other.

He skipped nimbly about after Clown No. 1, translating his jokes, laughing consumedly at them himself in a way that made the audience laugh till they nearly fell off the benches, chaffing him, always in French, often in French argot: anon calling the donkey to him, fondling it like a little dog, and setting it to chase its legitimate master with open jaws round and

round the ring. Certainly le Diable Rouge, as the people dubbed him, was the success of the evening.

Dawn was breaking as the pair set forth by the mountain road towards Carhaix. They had stayed with their patient while the tent was taking down and the properties being packed for the next journey, had helped to lift him on to the bed of straw in one of the vans in which he was to travel, and had finally found great difficulty in parting with Mr. Perrownick, who would have offered them the half of his kingdom to remain with him.

"What a queer evening this has been!" said Phenice, slipping her hand into her husband's arm. "Do you know I got quite fond of that boy. I really feel sorry to think we shall most likely never see any of them again."

"Ay. 'Like ships that pass in the night,'" quoted Jasper. "That is always my fate as I travel on and on. Except with you, wife—except with you."

## III.

A LONG, white, dusty road: behind a line of intensely blue sea beyond the groves of olive and mulberry through which the way had wound; before, far, far ahead, dazzling, white peaks of eternal snow. On the nearer slopes a flock of shaggy goats were feeding, herded by a gaunt woman in baggy trousers with a blue yashmak shadowing her dark face. Along the road travelled a pack-horse laden in curious fashion; an oddly shaped package in green baize was balanced across him, and on the saddle sat a woman sideways, not a very easy posture to maintain upon a Turkish saddle. Her hands, however, were free to hold on; she rather sat upon the horse than rode it, for it was being led by the bridle by the man who walked beside.

At the sight of the goats he halted and called out to the goat-herd in a strange tongue. The woman heard, for she raised her head, but she only moved a little further off, driving some stragglers with a switch she held.

He put the reins into his wife's hand. "Here, hold on a minute while I try if I can't catch that wild-looking wench. You'd like a drink of milk, wouldn't you, Phenie?"

"I should indeed, I am horribly thirsty; but don't go far and leave me."

While he went she watched rather apprehensively a herd of huge buffaloes who were wallowing in the

dried mud at the side of the road a little ahead; their great curly heads and monstrous shoulders making her think of a bull in a nightmare; their unkempt, shaggy coats, crusted with mud, adding to their formidable appearance.

He came back in a minute, laughing and shaking his head. "It is no go," he said; "she either can't or won't understand. I've tried her in every Eastern tongue I can think of; I expect she is a Kurd. I fancied a small clod came after me with a sound of *Giaour!* Thanks to my dark face and my tongue I am not often taken for a giaour, but I dare say if you had been riding astride, as a well-conducted Turkish woman would, she'd have milked a goat for you."

"I am sorry; I don't think I could. It looks so very uncomfortable—and unnice."

"Well, never mind. It was on your account I wanted it. I rather think we shall find a *kahveh-jee* further on, if my memory serves me. G-r-r-r-r"—this to a buffalo who had come inconveniently near, but at this address lumbered off down the bank again.

They plodded on some way in silence. Jasper loved silence better than speech unless he were embarked on a yarn; ordinary remarks on things were never in his way. Phenice's thoughts travelled homewards: she wondered what they were doing at home and how they got on without her; whether they had given up her poultry yard or got in a woman to see to it. The dairy, too; they must surely have got an extra hand for that; Polly would never have been able to manage the butter-making properly all by herself. They never wrote to her nor she to them. She sighed.

Then she wondered how her parlour looked without her to keep it in order. How cool it would be in there on a blazing day like this, in the green, shaded dimness. Perhaps Dan would take a wife; very likely; a farm needed a woman. If he did would they give her the spotted shells and the inlaid workbox, all the little personal possessions she herself had abandoned, or would they put them away as though their owner had been dead?

They had crested the next ridge now, and were entering the shade of an oak wood where a stream bubbled up, making the grass fresh and green, and where for a while they lost sight of the snowy beacon of Olympus.

"Ah, didn't I tell you? There's the old *kahveh-jee* in his grey beard; not a day older than when I was here before. Now you shall have something to drink and a good rest," said Jasper as he lifted her down.

To appreciate such shade one should have travelled as they had done, along glaring white roads under an Eastern sun. The pack-horse, relieved of the double burden of Phenice and her harp, was soon tethered at a little distance, while the wayfarers reposed on a mossy bank under the spreading arms of an oak-tree, and drank syrup cooled by lumps of snow from the crown of Olympus, offered with solemn stateliness by an old turbaned Turk, who might have stepped out of the pages of the "Arabian Nights." Having served them he seated himself upon the ground and watched them gravely, while he smoked his hookah with a soft, bubbling sound like a kettle that is on the point to boil. The silence was unbroken.

The mossy cushions were very soft, and Phenice leaned back with her head pillowed on the high, peaked saddle which Jasper had taken off to ease the horse. The bubbling of the hookah seemed further off, changed to the singing of the kettle on the hob when the lazy afternoon has worn well on its way to tea-making time. That kettle would boil soon. How still the house was when the men were all away at work. Was that the kettle singing, after all, or the cat purring? the old yellow cat who had lived at the farm so long? It was always such a sleepy sound; she would open her eyes presently and see if it were not time to make the tea; only not yet, not yet. The cat stopped purring, and she stirred a little. How sound one might sleep in an armchair!

. . . Asleep? Not she: she was awake and out upon the road, the road that wound across the hills into the sunset, following the lilting of a tune that went on ahead, just out of sight—always out of sight, however fast she walked. What a wonderful tune it was, and how it kept calling her on! But the road was much steeper than she had thought; steeper and steeper the further she went. And she was impeded, too, with a weight in her arms that was growing heavier at each step. If only she could put it down! But she could not, for it was a child, and she knew it would die if she left it. Fainter and fainter grew the tune that she followed, and it was growing dark. She tried to call out, "Wait for me!" but her voice failed; her foot slipped; she made one frantic effort to save the child——

"My dear wife, how you have slept! I hadn't the

heart to wake you before, but we really ought to be moving."

She gripped his coat-sleeve hard, her eyes gazing into his with apprehension.

"It is really you? I have found you?" she said.

"Why, you are asleep still, I do believe. Found me? I haven't been away from your side the whole time. You have been dreaming."

"I suppose I have; I thought I was at home, and then I thought—— Oh! why didn't you wake me before?"

"You seemed so tired, I thought you should have your nap out. I hope you haven't got a touch of the sun. However, we shall have no more trouble on that score; the sky seems quite overcast."

Phenice shivered. "It is so dark," she said. "I don't half like it."

"There's a storm brewing; we must hurry if we mean to reach shelter before it comes down from the mountains."

He began with haste to saddle the beast and arrange the harp on the crupper, so as to leave room for Phenice to sit before it.

Instead of the deep, cool shade contrasted with glaring light without, the grove now was filled with a hot, heavy gloom, and a low rumble from the far away mountains seemed to pass under their feet and away, away to the hills the other side. The oak-trees shivered and turned up the under sides of their leaves with a blenched look.

Phenice looked at the little shed where the old *kahveh-jee* sat serene among his cups and glasses.

"Hadn't we better stay where there is shelter till the storm passes over?"

Jasper pointed to a riven oak that stood not many yards away. "That is what happens here," he said, "when the storms come sweeping down."

"But he must be used to it, and look how calm he is," she urged.

Jasper shrugged his shoulders. "He would only say, *Kismet,* if you pointed out to him that his roof-tree might be struck over his head as like as not. It is a good working philosophy, still—— Well, come along, and let me hoist you up. You must hold on tight, for I mean to trot."

The white beacon peaks had vanished, and from the battlements the lurid clouds were marshalling in great battalions and sweeping down the valley, while an ominous roar, with an occasional sharp rattle as of musketry, sounded from the heights like the beginning of a battle, but as yet the storm had not reached them. An occasional gleam caught the domes and minarets of the great white town that nestled on the lower ridges of the mountain, but Phenice dared hardly look; her head was bent to try and save her eyes from the gritty dust that sudden gusts whirled up into them.

She remembered the storm in the forest, and thought longingly of Pamela and of Ikey's cart, but the only thing to be seen on all the length of road before them was a string of camels gauntly pacing along under their burdens; two or three little ones trotted beside them, their little soft humps sticking out of holes cut in the saddle-cloths that covered them. Phenice's steed had to draw to the very edge of the

causeway out of the way of the swinging stride as they passed, or the wide overhanging loads would almost have swept her from her saddle. Jasper exchanged a few words in one of the unknown tongues that seemed to come so easy to him with the shaggy, wild-looking men who were in charge of the cavalcade, and one, stretching out a bony hand from his draperies, pointed to a low ridge, away to the left, under the shadow of which there seemed to be some broken brick-work and a few gaunt cypresses. Shelter, Phenice hoped, for they were journeying toward the storm, and could hardly reach the town before it would be upon them. The camels hastened on; they were travelling down the wind, and might race the tempest. Soon they were lost in a cloud of dust.

"They make me think of the Ishmaelites who carried Joseph down into Egypt," said Phenice. "Fancy there being merchantmen like that after all these hundreds of years!"

Jasper did not answer; he was trotting close to the horse's neck with one arm thrown across his wife's knees to keep her steady, and no breath to spare for conversation.

Through the blinding dust she tried to make out whether the scrap of low ruin which was their only hope of shelter was really getting nearer; the storm was, that was very certain; the whole earth beneath the horse's feet seemed to tremble and groan with it, and the sky turned livid.

A glare that wrapped them in an instant's scorching flame, a roar that burst up from the earth at their very feet; her hold was wrenched from the pommel. With

the thought "This is death," she seemed slipping into an abyss. For a second life had stopped; then she was on her feet and stumbling up the bank down which she had rolled. Pack-horse, saddle, harp, lay in an indistinguishable heap in the roadway, but Jasper—oh, thank God!—Jasper stood erect and unharmed beside it.

"Run, wife, run!" he cried, and pointed to the bit of ruined wall against the hillside, and putting her cloak over her head, for the hailstones began to batter her like pebbles, Phenice ran for her life across the heavy sandy ground, quickened by another terrific glare and a report like musketry.

It seemed to be a burial-place, though long disused; there was no inclosure; tall, narrow head-stones surmounted by turbans stood erect here and there, though most had fallen prostrate, and in the side of the hill there were some excavations, of which only a few were closed with stones. Into one of these, in front of which were some remains of a brick portico fallen into decay, Phenice crept, her foot striking as she did so against what she thought was a big stone; it rolled into the light, and a flash showed her eyeless sockets and a grinning row of teeth. Mouldered bones and the ghosts of long-dead Mussulmans might be disagreeable neighbours, but shelter from the break-up of the heavens and the earth must be had at any price: she hid her eyes and stumbled in.

After a brief agony of watching through a torrent that made sight impossible, the aperture was darkened, and Jasper, laden with the harp, crept panting into shelter.

"It is not hurt," he gasped as he let his burden slide to the ground, "but where, in Heaven's name, is the fiddle?"

"Here, under my cloak, quite safe. And Zuleika?"

"Dead as a stone. She did not suffer, poor beast; she must have died as she dropped."

"Ah," breathed Phenice as she hid her eyes; "and it might have been you!"

"*Kismet*," said Jasper, and drew further back into the shadow.

Dry and dusty as they were, Phenice did not relish the near neighbourhood of those horrible relics, and preferred to crouch in the aperture, watching, with calm eyes that hardly blenched, the wild, forked lightnings play about the mountain side.

Presently he called her. "Come here."

"It is quite safe here, I think," she answered, "and I am not afraid. It is so close and queer and horrible in there."

"But I want you." He held out his arms, and she went to him and let him gather her into them and hold her against his heart. With every flash she felt a long shudder run through him, from head to foot.

She drew his head down to her breast, and whispered, "Jasper, do you mind it? I thought you were afraid of nothing."

"Afraid?" he answered; "it is not that. If the lightning struck me, I could answer, *Adsum*, but I feel the electric thrill in all my blood: every flash and every peal go through me. I have felt it coming all day, as if a brooding horror were over me."

"And it helps you to hold me like this?"

"I feel as if some of your stillness and calm passed into me with your very touch."

Storm after storm came hurtling down from the heights till night fell, and they were still prisoners in the place of tombs, and when at last the noise sank into stillness, and the great diamond stars hung trembling in the wide arch of deep stainless sapphire, it was too late to take to the road again; they must e'en make the best of the shelter they had found.

Jasper lay across the opening, his little revolver ready to his hand, primed for wandering brigands or prowling jackals, whichever the night might bring, and Phenice kept her eyes hidden against his breast. She could face the lightning without flinching, but she feared horribly to catch a glimpse of that skull against which her foot had stumbled.

It seemed a gruesome bed, and yet in days to come, in smiling meadows, in houses safe and warm with the curtains drawn, Phenice would look back and remember most keenly of all the strange resting-places she had known, that night she had spent in Jasper's arms amongst the dead men's bones.

## IV.

FROM the night of mystery and strangeness, of horror and deep comfort, our pair stepped forth into a morning new-washed and radiant. Though the sun had arisen in his might, a cool, crisp air came down from the snows of Olympus. The very streets seemed absolved by last night's tears; not only domes and minarets glistened as they lifted themselves into the morning light, but the wet cobblestones underfoot shone, and the pools between them smiled with an innocent blue like a child's eyes.

They must needs trudge afoot since their faithful Zuleika lay on the sand by the roadside, and already the vultures were gathered together. And trudge fasting, too, for Phenice would by no means breakfast till the experiences of the night lay well behind her. Though the distance was not great she thought she had never really known what hunger was till she was sitting by a little table at an Armenian coffee stall, with Jasper cutting hunches from half a yard of bread for her, while the polyglot waiter poured coffee and milk steaming into a huge white cup.

Close above them a slender minaret seemed to pierce the sky, from the summit of which the haunting, mystic cry of the muezzin rang out over the busy city. Her heart was full of prayer and thankfulness, and went up in response to the call. Then she

laughed joyously as she looked round her, for the street was like a page out of the "Arabian Nights." Just before her a large and stately ass, wearing a string of turquoise blue beads as a charm, stepped carefully among the cobblestones and dozing dogs, bearing a still more stately rider, whose long robe was spread over the beast's tail after the manner of a hussar's great-coat, and whose long white beard and heavy turban scarcely swayed as moved along. Two white-robed mollahs went by and disappeared into a neighbouring mosque, and a woman in a yashmak, looking like an animated bundle, with bright eyes glittering over the drapery that hid nose and mouth, slipped along in the shadow of the wall. An ariba next, drawn by white bullocks and driven by a black man, containing a row of veiled ladies who leaned their backs against gay, painted cushions and dangled their little red slippers over the wheel.

"Oh, look, Jasper!" she cried.

He laughed. "A cat may not look at a queen in this country, or the black guardians will know the reason why."

The colour with which everything glowed seemed to heighten the senses like stimulant: the fearless crimson, pink, amber, purple, of draperies and wares; the blues and greens of tiles and pottery; above all the glow of a pyramid of oranges and tomatoes poised on a fruit-seller's head, were almost audacious after the subdued neutral tints of our grim cities, and gave Phenice quite an intoxicated feeling. Then the little children, too; how quaint they looked in their long, flowered gowns: one little maiden especially took

Phenice's fancy, in pink satin trousers with a white gauze overcoat. She held out her hand and tried to attract the little one with a red flower she picked up from the table, but instead of the confiding smile she expected, received a little handful of dust full in her face as the children fled with the cry of "*Giaour!*"

"To-day," said Jasper, leaning back, his easily satisfied appetite already stayed with a crust of bread and a good pull at the strong coffee. "To-day I propose we 'do' the place like regular tourists. Here's money for present needs. We'll house the harp with our friend here, and travel free. You shall see the Green Mosque and the tombs of the ancient sultans, and learn something more than you have known yet of the mystery of godliness."

"The mystery of godliness!" What could he mean? She looked at him with asking eyes, but he was smoking and musing.

Some faint glimmering came to her later when in the dim, mystic twilight of the great mosque she saw the white-robed worshippers, scattered over the wide space, each prostrate on his prayer-mat, bow their foreheads before the One God in unfeigned faith and devotion. She obeyed a sign from Jasper and took off her shoes at the entrance, and as soon as the worship was concluded, they slipped softly in with noiseless foot. An Imaum in a kind of narrow pulpit was still reciting passages from the Koran in a monotonous sing-song voice to a circle of students who sat round him cross-legged, swaying to the cadence of his voice, but these presently departed, and they could examine the marvellous porcelain decorations and strange mystic mono-

grams. In the midst was a great marble tank, where the water gave back the green gloom like a well in the heart of a forest.

Phenice understood but little of what she saw, but her mind was impressed by the religious atmosphere of the place, and when presently it was invaded by a group of chattering tourists, led by a Levantine dragoman with his glib explanations of everything, she and Jasper looked at each other and went outside.

Later, in the glowing afternoon, they were sitting in the shade in the rose-garden that surrounds the tombs of the early sultans, and Phenice was still brooding on the perplexities of faith, while Jasper on his back at her feet ruminated over a pipe. The soft fall of a petal dropping on his face roused him.

"Well?" he said, taking the pipe from his lips and turning his head a little.

"I am puzzled."

Well she might be. Brought up in the narrowest provincialism of Protestant-Anglican teaching, in the implicit faith that Englishmen were Christians and the rest of the world merely "foreigners": that Antichrist meant the Pope or Mahomet or both; to be led rapidly through Churches Catholic and Orthodox till she had arrived at Islam; to have talked with Nestorians, Jews, Greeks, and Armenians, was enough to bewilder a pupil of Mrs. Biddlecombe. It would have been so comfortable to believe that all these people were wicked or ignorant; or, on the other hand, that if you did your duty nothing mattered much, and one way of thinking was as good as an-

other. Was all the blood of martyrs shed for dreams? She recalled the passionate loyalty of a Greek who had been talking to Jasper one night on board the boat from Smyrna. "A Greek never changes his religion. The Greek king is a foreigner; Greece is not ours; we have only our Church; we are at least loyal to that."

Was the greater part of the world loyal to error? Was truth indeed the exclusive possession of one small, though intelligent, country—which exercised its intelligence in holding its treasure for the most part but slackly? As these ideas passed confusedly through her mind she looked at Jasper, her eyes full of a dumb questioning. With all his eccentricities there were sometimes streaks of a profound wisdom in him, picked up on his wanderings.

"Well, wife," he said with a smile, "do you want to turn Moslem?"

"No, but, Jasper, things can't be true and false both; can they?"

"No, but they may be partly true. Of certain truths these people have got a grip that some of our orthodox folk at home might envy them. There is but One God. There is something beyond that makes it worth while for a man to lose his life for an idea. There is a life of the spirit as well as a life of the flesh—though the ecstasies of the dervishes seem to us a queer way of seeking it. Truth is a virtue, and courage, and cleanliness: these things are not of the devil, and it is by these that Islam has lived; by its vices, its cruelty, its lust, it has kept its followers in barbarism. The Greek Empire, and with it the Greek Church, was rotten to the core when it came. All

great religions that have swayed millions and held on through centuries have surely some of God's truth in them, if only fragments. I have met Brahmans in Kashmir and Upper Burmah—heathens, the missionaries called them—whose Christianity put that of most Europeans to shame."

He put his pipe in his mouth again.

Phenice mused on, feeling after an idea that had come to her when she stood on the hillside at Athens, and they had shown her where St. Paul had delivered his great missionary sermon. He had not taken the line of calling his hearers heathen. "The God whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." That meant that Christianity was the supreme revelation to which all the religions devised by man were tending. Was that what Jasper had in his mind in his odd reference to "the mystery of godliness"? She sighed. The world was too wide to be fitted to the measure of her parish church.

The fountains tinkled, the roses bloomed peacefully, the turbehs stood placid in the afternoon sunshine as they had stood for hundreds of years. Where were they all now? The men who had planted these rose gardens and set these fountains playing; who had built these turbehs for their bones that their names might never perish out of the land? Where were Osman and Orchan? Where was he who had had his grave roofed only with a grating that the rain of heaven might fall upon it? Had they met those others with whom they had fought in life? John, who died broken-hearted? Constantine, who met a hero's death on the walls of his imperial city? Did they look back

upon their battles as the quarrels of children for toys? The questions were too big; they crowded too thick. She got up and shook them off as she shook the fallen rose-leaves from her lap, and strolled along one of the flowery alleys. Then she became aware that they were no longer alone: a man in light-grey clothes was sitting on a fallen bit of carved masonry, drawing diligently —the group of turbehs, she supposed, until she noticed that each time he raised his head it was on Jasper's long, gaunt figure, stretched out comfortably in repose, that his eye was fixed. The desire to see the sketch became irresistible; she glided softly behind the artist, and stopped a moment, half hidden in a rose thicket.

Yes, it was Jasper to the life; the india-rubber face, the strong, nervous hands, the pose as easy as a panther. She watched the lines grow under the pencil fascinated, and presently when Jasper, with a mighty yawn and stretch, rolled over, she cried out, "Oh, Jasper; don't move!"

"Eh?" he cried; "what's up?"

The sketcher turned and took off his grey sombrero.

"*Merci bien, madame; c'est fait.*" And he began to put up his sketchbook.

Then Phenice became aware of the extreme unconventionality of her demeanour, and hurried back to her husband's side and began to murmur some explanations. The Frenchman followed her, hat in hand.

"*Pardon!*" Then, in English, "Madame would perhaps like to see the little drawing I have taken the liberty to make of monsieur?"

Jasper held out his hand for it, Phenice being still overcome with unwonted shyness. While he looked at it, chuckling at the unflattering yet brilliantly true likeness, she ventured a glance at the artist, a typical Frenchman with black hair *en brosse* and an imperial.

"If you would permit me to make another slight study, I should be happy to present this one to madame, since it has been so fortunate as to win her approval."

"With all my heart," said Jasper. "As before?"

"Put yourself just as you please; only no pose——but I should say you had no pose in you."

While he seized the effect he wanted, in a few rapid strokes with a very short end of cedar pencil, three others arrived on the scene, French also—at least two of them, to judge by appearance; a man with a similar pointed beard, only chestnut red instead of black, and two women; one large, soft, sleepy-looking, with a touch of Greek beauty about the brows and of Turkish languor about the full-lipped mouth and heavy-lidded eyes; the other small, alert, Parisian, with a head like a little bird looking out of a setting of chiffon frills.

Jasper seemed to experience no greater difficulty in making friends with them all than he had done with Mr. Perrownick and the Freeling Family, and in a few minutes they were all seated sociably on the grass together, and had introduced themselves to each other without needless formality. The first artist, it appeared, was a M. Yxe, and the little Frenchwoman was his wife; the other was also a painter, M. Duprez. The quartette had taken rooms for the summer in the house of their Armenian dragoman, while they made

studies for the great pictures which were to make their fortunes at next year's Salon. Yxe was at work on a realistic study of primitive silk-weaving. Duprez had gone in for brigands in the mountain passes of Olympus. It was presently arranged that Jasper and his wife should dine with their new acquaintances, evening dress of course not being *de rigueur.*

After dinner they sat out on a little terrace under the great calm stars, sipping thick, sweet *café Turc* and smoking. Phenice sat silent and wistful; they were very kind to her, but she did not know how to talk to them; their world was not her world, and she realised she was a long way yet from gaining Jasper's rapid adaptability. She could not always quite follow them, either; Mme. Duprez talked little, though she spoke English well, and little Mme. Yxe's broken English was more puzzling than French; it was so rapid and so emphatic.

Her husband, sitting over there on the balustrade, seemed very happy. She could not catch what was being said, but she could see much gesticulation, and peals of laughter broke out from time to time. Presently she heard:

"You really ought to come; it is worth the journey." And Jasper:

"Ah, now I begin to realise what it is to be a married man. There are places to which you cannot lug a harp and a wife."

"A harp! Good Heavens, no! But why not leave the one in charge of the other?"

"And both in the care of our wives?" put in Yxe. "Anastasie and Lulu would be delighted to look after

her, and old Aristides Pauli will be responsible for the whole party till we get back."

Mme. Yxe clapped her hands. "Charming!" she cried. "We will have the greatest fun; we will make old Aristides take us to the bazaars every day, and won't we make the money fly! You owe us that, if you forsake us."

Phenice did not answer, unless beseeching eyes turned on Jasper were an answer.

Anastasie stretched out a warm, soft hand and laid it on hers. "Do stay with us," she said. "It is so amusing to have foreigners to talk to, and we will make you so happy."

"This is very good of you," said Jasper. "It is a splendid idea, if you are sure it won't be putting you out. I shan't be gone long, Phenie; only a matter of five days or so."

The stars had turned to fireflies through the veil that had come over Phenice's eyes. To follow Jasper to the world's end and beyond, that she was ready for, but to be left by the roadside—was that part of her wifely duty, too?

"Well, we'll leave you ladies to arrange it together," said Jasper, getting up. "We are going out for a stroll. Don't sit up, Phenie."

That night Phenice slept in a bed. But behind the mosquito curtains she wept and thought with longing of last night's gruesome resting-place.

## V.

"THE husbands ought to turn up to-day, if nothing has happened to them," remarked Anastasie languidly, giving the hammock in which she lay a slight swing as she leaned over to dip her pointed fingers into a silver dish of *rahatlakoum* that was on a Moorish stand at her elbow.

Lulu, who was at work, bit off her thread with a snap and looked up.

"I hope not, I am sure. I had set my heart on finishing this blouse before they came."

Phenice was doing nothing. A book was on her lap, but she was not reading. She sat on the top step of the balcony, leaning her back against the balustrade and listening for footsteps in the road below the garden wall. He had said five days, and this was the sixth. The day was yet young and cool, but it would be hot presently. They were sitting out on the little loggia at the side of the house, which overhung the slope of the hill. Below them was a sea of blossom, the purple of the bougainvillia with which the loggia was draped mingling with the redder purple of the Judas-trees below, whose laden branches crossed and recrossed each other. Between the boughs were glimpses of white minarets and the delicate copper-green of the domes of mosque or turbeh. The snow-peaks of Olympus that Phenice looked for

could not be seen; the lower ridges hid them, and the thicket of flowers shut out all view of the road. The expression of her face was as though she had become all ear. Anastasie swung in her direction and lightly touched her cheek.

"This poor Phenice!" she said. "It is still the *lune de miel* with her, and she does not yet understand how good it is to get rid of *ces messieurs* for a little. *Tiens!* how shocked she looks! One loves them; oh, yes, and is enchanted to see them again, but the world is not empty when they go." She laughed softly.

"*Pauvre petite!*" said Lulu, who was about half Phenice's size. "It is not good for you to be idle, *ma mie.* Help me finish my blouse, there's a darling; You do work so beautifully: yours will ravish M. Jasper when he returns."

For Phenice had been spending the time of her husband's absence in small feminine vanities; her severe travelling garb had been laid aside, and Anastasie had lent her a white skirt for coolness. The first care of her new friends was to conduct her to the bazaars, where, under Lulu's auspices, after infinite chaffering, she had purchased a piece of gauze of the coarse waste silk from the looms, cream-white with an amber thread, out of which she had manufactured a loose blouse such as they wore, which set off becomingly the graceful outline of her bust.

She roused herself and took out her thimble. "You are right," she said, "I am silly, but—had you ever left your home before you were married? I never had except to go to school, and without him I feel so lost."

"Left home? I never had any that I can remember," said Lulu. "I was a baby when my mother died; there were a lot of us, and we were all shared about among relations; an aunt took me and did her duty by me, as she used to say. She brought me up to her business,—she was a milliner,—but I hated the confinement, and when I grew up we had words, and I left her and set up for myself."

"I should have thought you would find the confinement worse if you had the business to look after, all by yourself," said Phenice, as the speaker paused to crease a hem.

Lulu laughed. "Oh, it was not a milliner's business: that would not have suited me at all. Besides, where on earth was my capital to come from? No; I set up as a model."

"A model?" The word conveyed no meaning to Phenice's ignorance.

"An artist's model, don't you know? I went about to the studios and sat for so much an hour. Weary work enough it was, sometimes. Still, it was a change, and it was amusing. Ah, but I could tell you some funny things! I had experiences, if you like!"

"It must have been a queer life."

"I believe you! A queer life, and a queer lot; good and bad mixed, most of them, except *le petit cochon* —that is what I call Henri, you know—he was all good. When he was to leave Paris to come to the East I nearly cried my eyes out; and then one day he said, why shouldn't I marry him and come, too? So, *me voici!* You can't expect me to be homesick, after that."

"I don't think I ever was homesick, either," said Anastasie in her slow, dreamy voice. "I ran away from school. Since we are on the subject of reminiscences you may as well have mine, though I don't think they are very amusing. My people wanted to Europeanise me, so they sent me to the English High School at Scutari: lots of Armenian girls go there. That is how it is I speak English so well. After a bit I got rather bored with the hours and the rules, so I thought I could not carry out my family's wishes more completely than by marrying a Frenchman. They were ungrateful enough not to be pleased, because they had not been consulted beforehand."

"But how did you get to know M. Duprez?" asked Phenice, rather amused by this phlegmatic account of a romance.

"Oh, he was giving painting lessons in the school, and we had a regular system of writing little notes on the edge of the copies and rubbing them out with bread. There was such a fuss when it was found I was gone: it was really rather funny. My father has not quite got over it yet, though Jules is as good as bread, and is certain to be famous some day. He had come out with Henri Yxe and Lulu, so I got a friend and a husband both"—she blew a kiss to Lulu. "I think I did well."

"It is just as well to have both, in such a country as this," remarked Lulu. "We keep each other's spirits up when the husbands go off sketching, and we can relieve our minds by abusing them to each other when they are tiresome—ah!"

Away went thimble, and away went a mass of gauze

finery, for a step crunched on the gravel below. The little figure flew like a whirlwind down the steps and at the throat of the black-bearded Frenchman. Even the languid Anastasie was in the arms of her Jules, but Phenice stood still at the top of the steps, her breath coming a little short.

"Well, wife," said Jasper, coming up to her; "how have you been getting on, eh?"

He just touched her chin with his finger.

"Pretty well," she answered; "but oh, I am glad, I am glad!"

"So am I. Do you know I did not more than half like leaving you." And Phenice was content.

## VI.

ENGLAND once more: England in a flowery May. Phenice was resting in a cowslip field, lying full-length in the grass; her uncovered head pillowed on her left arm against the bank, her right hand moving idly amongst the cool, pale-green stalks and fragrant blossoms. She did not mind insects in her hair or little spiders tickling her neck in their journeys of investigation; she shared Jasper's perfect familiarity with wild life, big or little: only she drew the line at earwigs, but there are no earwigs in a cowslip field.

He lay at a little distance, not smoking; he would not so have outraged the sweet breath that rose from all the meadow like incense. He rolled over presently, so as to face her.

"Rested, wife?" he said. "Do you know it strikes me we must be footing it soon, if we mean to have any supper to-night. The money-bag is growing uncommonly lean," as he fingered the scarlet belt he wore.

"Why, what do you mean to do?" She got no answer, she seldom did; so she resumed, "At any rate let us stop here for tea; it is too delicious to move yet, and I am sure I hear the sound of water down there behind those hawthorns. I have some tea left in the bag and a morsel of cake, and here's a penny for some milk; they'd be sure to let you have a drop at that

cottage we passed. You filled up the spirit-flask yesterday, you remember, so we shan't have to bother about sticks. I'll fill the kettle, if you'll fetch the milk."

"You stay where you are. I'm going to fag to-day."

He went off to the cottage which was blinking one eye at them through the gate at the top of the field, and wheedled the grumpy old mistress of it not only out of a penn'orth of milk, but the loan of a jug to carry it in. "More than Phenice could have done," he said to himself with complacency. Then down by the trodden way between the bushes where the cattle went down to drink, where laden white may-trees leaned over to look at their own reflections in the narrow river, and an ancient and unseaworthy punt hung upon a rope, hinting at the possibility of getting across for such as were eager to pursue their journey.

"Phenie would have filled it here, I'll be bound," he remarked as he kicked off his shoes and, kettle in hand, waded upstream to where a little brook trickled in from above, pure and fresh.

"Madam, tea is served," he announced presently, and Phenice drew herself up from the grass and rubbed her eyes with a yawn.

"Sleepy still, wife?" he said, sitting on his heels to pour out.

"I'm not really tired; only lazy, you know; we haven't come far to-day."

"Not on our feet perhaps, but we have come through a considerable number of centuries: it is wonderful what a deal of travelling you can do in a few

miles of English country. Look back there upstream at that long old grey church with its broken-nosed crusaders and its dim, musty memories of monks and friars. The Dark Ages, some are pleased to call that old time. That dull, sleepy little town where you got the cake was alive enough then, I'll warrant; alive, too, in those fierce days when Englishmen were at each others' throats, when unlucky Charles kept his court over yonder: they had something to keep awake for then. And that queer little old town we came through this morning early. Didn't you see Sir Roger de Coverley or 'my uncle Toby' crossing the inn-yard where the ducks were hanging in couples on the gateway?"

Phenice shook her head. "Dear me, no!" she said. "I never think of all those things unless you tell me. I only see with your eyes. However you come to think of them, I can't imagine. You are the very oddest tramp."

He laughed. "And then that alms-house down by the river," he went on, unheeding, "where old men spent peaceful days while their church was being pulled about their ears and they never knew it. I should like to end my days in an alms-house, shouldn't you? Sitting under a pent-house on an old wooden bench worn into comfortable hollows by other people's backs and elbows, with a large-print Bible on my knee, and my spectacles not on my nose, but in my lap, with my eyes shut, listening to the stories the river told as it went slipping by. But I shall never get into an alms-house, Phenie, nor you either; they don't put vagabonds into alms-houses."

"You know very well you'd hate it. Now I am going to wash up and put the things together and then we'll go on, if you like."

"Stay a minute; I've not finished my dissertation yet—nor my tea; pass the mug. We are going to end our peregrinations by walking into the very beginning of the twentieth century: young England, young London. It is Whitsuntide, you know."

Phenice had long given over expecting to understand her husband or asking him for explanations; when he emptied the cup and rose, she followed obedient and wifelike, carrying the small baggage while he carried the large. Her harp always travelled on his back; his fiddle-case in her hand, while each wore a small knapsack. By means of the old green punt they made the other side of the river without shipwreck, and then followed its windings between sedge and osier till it brought them to the wide, silver Thames.

As Phenice walked behind along the narrow tow-path something colder and damper than willow-herb thrust itself into her hand that hung down beside her, and, looking down, she saw a nondescript dog with a large white frill round his neck, tied with scarlet tassels in front. He sat up when she spoke to him, and waved one paw as if offering to shake hands.

"Oh, Jasper, look! Isn't he a dear? I wish I had a bit of cake left."

Clumping along the tow-path behind came the dog's master, a crooked man with a club-foot.

"He aint hungry, missus: he've hed his tea. 'Tis just his civility like. He's a knowin' one, he is."

Jasper looked over his shoulder. "Good-evening, mate. Going to Broomhill Fair?"

"Land sakes! if it aint Jasper! Never knew as you hed a missus. But there, it must be a matter o' four year since you and me tramped it together through Yorkshire."

"More than that, mate: it was before I went to the East. And how has the world been wagging with you?"

The cripple made such haste to limp after Jasper that he nearly swept Phenice off the bank with his Punch and Judy show, which he carried over his shoulder and swung with a jerk as he hobbled along. The two men walked on together and she followed with the Toby-dog, who was most companionable and all but talked. She caught snatches of the conversation in front.

". . . Ah, you may say so! Times is out o' joint; that's what they be. Nobody don't care for a Punch and Judy show no more, 'cept 'tis the old folks: they gives a copper now and then, but 'tis a matter o' ha'pence, and a bloke can't live on ha'pence and keep a Toby-dawg, not as he should be kep'. . . Childern! Heugh!" with a sound of infinite contempt. "Why, I tell you there aint no childern nowadays. Them young persons out o' the board schools, they don't want no Punch and Judy shows; they puts their money in their money-boxes."

She heard Jasper's low laugh, and saw his fingers fumbling at the lean scarlet belt. She knew there was a shilling left in the emergency corner of it. Well, never mind; if they were to sleep in the fields to-night

she would not object, though the nights were dewy yet.

The tow-path debouched on a bit of high-road where a stone bridge of many arches crossed the wide river. Jasper paused, leaning on the parapet, till she came up with him. On the opposite shore the bank rose steeply, crowned with oak and white-blossomed may to the very top; against it in the hollow nestled a low creeper-covered hostelry; old-fashioned, yet with an unmistakable air of luxury and distinction about it quite unlike the usual wayside inn. The main building was small, but an annexe had been added, extending all along the garden and painted to match, snow-white picked out with red. On the opposite side of the broad roadway another addition appeared to be the dining-room, for from a row of ground-floor windows light streamed out across the dusty highway and with it sounds of laughter, of talk, clatter of knives and forks, while trim parlourmaids darted to and fro from the main building; evidently Society was dining.

"Look, Phenie, didn't I tell you? *Le monde où l'on s'amuse.*"

"It eats, at any rate, if it doesn't amuse itself," said Phenice with a little sigh, for the bit of cake had proved very small.

Far up to the west the reaches of the river swam in a flush of rose, and just where the sky paled to daffodil a slim new moon floated with one large bright star beside her.

Jasper sat down on the parapet and took out his pipe. "We'll wait till they have finished," he said.

The Punch and Judy man rested his stage up against the wall, and wiped his forehead with a red pocket handkerchief.

"You seem to feel the heat, friend," said Jasper.

"H'mph! So'd you if you had to carry that there dratted show."

Jasper puffed for a few minutes, then he took the pipe from his lips.

"Phenie, what does it remind you of?"

"I don't know. France, I think; that little place down on the Loire, don't you remember, where we played for the dancing?"

"Think so? Put a snow mountain in place of that pink cloud, and you have the Tyrol; try instead a steep hill with a vineyard and a ruined tower at top, and the river running just twice as fast, and there you are on the Mosel."

Meanwhile the travelling companion was taking his puppets out of their box and grumbling to himself over them, sitting on his heels in the dust. He held up an unfortunate dolly from whose waist a faded scarlet rag floated like a pennon.

"Dear, dear! Ever see the like o' that now? How ever's Judy to play without her perricut? A sheer laughin' stock she'd be! 'Spose you aint got a pin, missus?"

"She has got a thimble, which is better still. I assure you I am not allowed to go ragged these days, Dick. Come, Phenie, see if you can't act the Reise-Gesell for our poor friend here."

Phenice seated herself comfortably on the ground with her back against Jasper's knees, and held out her

hand for the doll, while thimble, scissors, needles, and cotton made their appearance in her lap as if by magic.

"I think I will take off her petticoat and turn it," she said. "It is not dirty inside."

She snipped and sewed and pinned while the Toby-dog and his master sat and watched her.

"Well, I never!" said the latter admiringly. "I won't need buy a new 'un yet. Worried by a dawg, the poor thing was. A great, ill-conditioned cur set on Toby, and I lays into him with the fust thing come handy, which happened to be Judy. He got a mouthful of her perricut afore I beat 'un off."

When she had finished with Judy and touched up the Beadle, Jasper rose to his feet. "Come on," he said; "they are coming out."

For there was a movement and people began to flock out of the French windows of the dining-room; quite a crowd, it seemed; pretty women, some in evening dress, some in boating costume, with bright silk shirts. If this was the world, it was a world in undress, quite without starch. They stood about in groups, chaffing one another and smoking. Some of the women had cigarettes, as well as all the men. They settled down presently on the benches by the door or in the garden, and a few strolled away along the river bank, chiefly the young ones, in pairs.

"Come," said Jasper to the travelling companion, "now's your chance."

"Not me!" said the lame man; "I'm not a-goin' to show off before them toffs. It 'ud be, 'Move on, you!' 'Garn out o' this!'"

"Why, it is just the toffs who'll shell out for you,

man. Haven't you found that out? They are the people who like a Punch and Judy show nowadays—so time brings its revenges."

"I don't know nothin' about revenge. I know my place, thankee. Well, good-night, missus." He held out a brown and very dirty hand to Phenice. "And thanks be for all favours. And don't you be hard on your good man for what he done for me. He's never wanted a bob yet, and while he's that free-handed he never will."

He shouldered his little canvas stage and trudged on up the hill, followed by the Toby-dog, and presently a sound of raucous squeaking and the rub-a-dub-dub of the drum announced that he had reached the village street and was trying to collect an audience.

Jasper crossed the road to where an oak made a dark island of shadow in the moonlight, and let the harp slide from his shoulder to the ground.

"Come, Phenie; since our friend despises the chance I offered him, let you and me see if we can't line our empty pockets."

He was in the vein that night, and when he was he could always sway Phenice as though one spirit moved them both. He knew his audience, too, and what would fetch them. First he played some Breton tunes filled with old-world mysterious fancies and the infinite longing of the sea. Then some of the Greek Klepht songs they had learned on their rambles, long-drawn, questioning melodies ending in a sudden joyous outburst, and last the Hungarian gipsy music that always fired his blood.

The first few bars had drawn the strollers back from the river bank, and the people who came along the road all waited on the fringe of the group by the inn door. A man with a team drew up hard by, and even the mail-cart paused on the bridge. There was loud applause when Jasper handed his fiddle to his wife and began to adjust the straps of the harp.

"You shall take round the hat to-night, wife, if you don't mind," he said, and Phenice wondered and obeyed.

Shillings and sixpences flowed in, halfcrowns too; no one gave copper, except the teamster; as to the postman, he drove on without giving anything at all. Remarks, too, were as rife as sixpences, and suggestions as to the wisdom of going to London and getting regular employment. A woman in a white gown, with diamonds at her throat, looked at Phenice with soft compassion.

"Aren't you very tired?" she asked with a slow drawl.

"Not at all, thank you; we have not come very far to-day, and we had a good rest at tea-time."

"But it must be a rough life for you, poor soul."

It was a man leaning on the back of the girl's chair who spoke, without taking the cigarette from his lips.

Phenice straightened herself and pushed back her hair with a little proud gesture. "We don't need any pity, thank you. If it is a rough life, it is a merry one. Didn't I hear you saying just now that it was like getting out of a cage to come down here? You caged birds need not pity us who fly free."

She crossed the moonlight into the island of dark

where Jasper was standing. He finished tying the green baize cover over the harp, and then looked up.

"Well, did you wish you were one of them, to have a good dinner every night, and pretty frocks?"

She did not answer, but she went close to him and put her cheek against his shoulder.

As they went back across the bridge, on their way to their more modest hostelry on the other side of the river, Jasper slipped his hand into his wife's arm.

"Did you notice that girl in white, with a pink lining to her cloak? I saw her speaking to you. That was my half-sister. I suppose the fellow behind her was the man she married. I heard she had made a good match."

"Your sister! Oh, Jasper! How I wish you would tell me who you are."

"Who I am; why, Jasper the fiddler, to be sure. What else?"

She sighed.

Suddenly he stooped down his head and kissed her.

"I am your husband. Isn't that enough for you?"

## VII.

A BROAD, flat tombstone is no bad resting-place on a summer afternoon. Jasper leaned back with his arms folded, smoking and ruminating, while his wife sat beside him, silent as was her wont. Flagged footpaths ran athwart the churchyard this way and that, shaded each with a double row of pollarded limes, from which a sweet, heavy scent was wafted whenever a breeze stirred, and a drowsy humming filled the air.

A lady and a little girl were crossing from the sunny fields at the back. The child looked over her shoulder as they passed.

"Mummy, look; what funny people!"

The lady glanced at the harp leaning against the railing round a tomb, and at the fiddle on Jasper's knee, at the brown faces and Phenice's worn garments.

"Tramps," she said briefly. "Come along, or perhaps they'll beg."

Presently Jasper knocked the ashes from his pipe, arose and shook himself.

"Well, shall we be moving?"

She assented and they passed through an iron gateway into the High Street. The great, broad church stood prominent, dominating the whole wide street with its heavy, square tower surmounted by an octagonal cupola. The south door opened right upon

the pavement, and was usually locked, but on this afternoon even the inner baize doors stood wide, and a woman was banging hassocks with a broom handle. To Phenice's surprise Jasper turned in, and she followed, wondering.

This did not seem a show church, nor yet the sort he cared about. Heavy galleries overhung the nave and darkened the windows, a dusty sunbeam showed a low communion table covered with faded red velvet, else she would hardly have known which was the east end, for the high brown-painted pews faced every way. It smelt close and dusty, dustier than usual, for the woman's efforts at cleaning had stirred up ancient accumulations.

Dark though it was, Jasper seemed to know his way about, and certainly had not come in out of curiosity, for he looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, but stalked on up the middle aisle and turned into a pew near the top. Phenice had paused to admire the Ten Commandments flanking the Lion and Unicorn in front of the west gallery; he beckoned to her. He was pointing to something in the corner, and she stooped and read "Jasper Waring," cut deep but roughly as with a boy's knife, and below an infinite number of little circular dents in the brown paint, where the toe of a child's boot had kicked Sunday by Sunday.

"Here sat I for two mortal hours every Sunday when I was a boy, with the birds singing and the forest calling outside. Do you wonder I was not a good boy?"

Phenice laid her hand on his arm.

"You are not a bad one now," she said.

"Well, come; I have something more to show you."

Outside the afternoon sunshine was smiling on the broad, quiet street, on the stately old houses that stood back behind their screens of laurel, on the windows of the dignified old-fashioned shops and on the glittering harness of a carriage and pair that was being slowly walked up and down in front of the post-office. The street sloped steeply down to the river, and on the further side rose wooded hills. Jasper stood a moment looking, like one who sees an old friend after a long time, then crossed to one of the largest of the houses, one that stood flush with the pavement. The lower part of the five ground-floor windows was closed with wire blinds, which gave a forbidding aspect. He did not ring at the front door, but merely looked up and down all the length of house-front with a queer expression.

"Jasper," his wife ventured, "was this your home?"

"Home? Prison, rather; my home, if I had one, was in the forest."

A lane ran down by the side of the house, and along it stretched a large garden, shaded with big elm-trees. The hedge was high, but through it Phenice could catch glimpses of light dresses, and could hear the irregular tap of croquet mallets. She looked at her husband, stalking on ahead and carrying his burden so lightly; she could not fancy him on the other side of the clipped hedge amongst the croquet hoops and the trim flower-beds; clearly his place—and hers—was outside, on the open road.

Downhill wound the lane, past garden walls, under

the shade of tall trees, with glimpses of rich men's houses over the palings, till at length they were in the open country, on a slightly raised causeway. On one hand stretched green fields with grazing cattle, crossed here and there with dykes the course of which was marked by tall reeds and rushes and plumy heads of purple sedge. Far out brown sails were slowly moving along invisible creeks and inlets; beyond, again, lay a narrow, gleaming line of sea, and a faint amethyst cloud against the opal sky.

About a mile along the road stood a little, lonely cottage, set round with thorn-trees. It was so still that the voice of a woman, reading aloud in the garden, reached them distinctly as they drew near. Jasper stood still.

"'All women are opposed to the nomad life——'"

"Rubbish!" broke in a sharp voice. "Women have done no bad work in exploring, let me tell you. Well, why don't you go on?"

"'All women are opposed to the nomad life, but most men, the staid and portly citizens no less than the imaginative, undeveloped artists, have something of the vagrom man in their composition. Even highly respectable and remunerative occupations do not always close the ears to the fluting on ahead of Stevenson's gauger, or prevent dreams of mysterious, fertile lands beyond the hills, without name or latitude or longitude—

> "'For who would gravely set his face
> To go to this or t'other place?
> There's nothing under heaven so blue
> That's fairly worth the travelling to.'

"'It is the joy of travelling, not the arrival, that is desired, and so——' Oh, Miss Christie! There's such a dreadful man looking over the hedge, listening. Hadn't we better go in?"

"Eh, what's the matter? What are you stopping for? Jasper! Is it you or your wraith? Come in, my dear boy! Margaret, you can go. Thank you for your reading."

The young lady, thus summarily dismissed, emerged from the gate, looking slightly dazed and staring at Jasper, who meanwhile coolly stepped over the low hedge and knelt down beside a wheelchair that was drawn up just outside a French window. The tall, old lady who sat in it, gaunt, shrivelled, spare, with a white face and white hair, put her two claw-like hands upon his shoulders, and was perusing his face with keen, blue eyes.

"Well," she said, "I suppose you are real—flesh and blood, I was going to say, but bones would be nearer the mark. How thin you are!"

"All the better for travelling. I don't want superfluous flesh to carry. I am as fit as possible."

"You have been a perfect brute to me," she went on, giving him a little shake, "never coming near me all these years, when you know——"

"I know. I am sorry. But I thought you would hate to see me, fresh from my rovings when you—poor old dear——"

"Oh, how stupid men are! They never understand. Here I sit, year in, year out; watching those slow barges glide by, and wondering what you are doing, while that monotonous girl reads travels to me which she hates."

He patted her knee soothingly.

"Well, now I have come, you see, and have brought something pretty to show you. Phenice, come here!"

But Phenice had gone to a little distance, and, sitting on the grass, was making friends with a lank child in a long pinafore who was herding geese. She got up and came slowly forward, as he beckoned. He took her hand and drew her inside the gate.

"So this is your wife? The padre told me. According to him, you seem to have had better luck than you deserve."

"I have," he said with emphasis. "Phenice, kiss Aunt Christie."

Shyly she drew near and put out her hand, but did not dare offer to kiss the hard nut-cracker face till a sharp pull drew her down.

"Sit there where I can see you. So you don't seem to have succeeded yet, as the padre was so sure you would."

"Succeeded? How?"

"Why, in making this rover settle down and become a respectable member of society."

"I never tried," said Phenice proudly. "I don't want to: so long as he will let me travel with him, I ask no more."

"Well done! You are one of the right sort. And where, may I ask, have you taken her to?" to Jasper.

"Oh, well! we have rambled about a bit; I hardly know where to. A little way into Armenia was our farthest, and since then we have been going in and out among the Greek islands. She has gone with me

everywhere except up Olympus. I didn't want her carried off by brigands, so I left her with some friends."

The old woman's sharp, blue eyes blinked as she looked at Phenice.

"I wonder if you know what a lucky girl you are," she said.

And Phenice remembered the glances of condescending pity she had encountered a few evenings ago, and answered, "Indeed I do."

"How would you bear to sit, as I have sat, in this chair for thirty years? It is just thirty years ago that I was on a more adventurous journey than ever you have made. I was bent on doing what no woman had ever done before me. I was hardy; I thought I could bear anything, but I braved risk once too often. I had to ford a river on horseback and sleep in my wet clothes. I had rheumatic fever, and they shipped me off home as soon as they could get me to the coast. I have never walked since; I am carried like a log and dressed and undressed like a doll."

Phenice's eyes filled. She bent her head and kissed the wrinkled hand that was gripping the arm of the chair.

"And I have Jasper's roving blood in my veins. No"—as she noticed Phenice's glance following her husband, who had walked to the other end of the garden and was standing with his back turned, looking at the rows of gaudy hollyhocks—"no, I know him better than you do. It is not want of feeling, but the other thing. I called him a brute just now, I know, but I didn't mean it. I believe it is because

it hurts him so intolerably to see me crippled like this that he never comes near me."

A prim, middle-aged maid-servant emerged from the house with a shawl over her arm.

"I've brought your shawl, ma'am; it is getting cool."

"Cool, nonsense! Come here, Prudence; who d'you think this is? Mr. Jasper's wife."

The woman courtesied demurely, disregarding Phenice's proffered hand, but her face relaxed a little as he came across the grass.

"Hullo, Prue!" was his greeting; "do you remember the squibs in the pocket of your Sunday gown?"

"I should think I did, sir! It give me the worst turn ever I had. A terrible young rascal you were, to be sure. And now I do hope you've come home for good, to settle down."

"Not I. We're off to-morrow to the fair at Nijni Novgorod: I have never seen that."

"Well, I only wish I could go too," said Miss Christie drily. "I suppose you will stop for dinner and a bed?"

"If you don't mind our being off in the morning before you are astir. I want to be well on our way to Greathampton before the heat of the day."

"Do as you like. As you always do," she added with a little laugh.

"Look here, Aunt Christie," he said with a slight embarrassment of manner very foreign to him, when the servant had disappeared into the house; "you have been awfully good to me, and I don't want to take it for granted, but I brought the wife here be-

cause I wanted you to see her. I can't make settlements, you know, but I thought perhaps you would not mind making it payable to her, in case anything happens to me."

"Of course; I'll look after her."

Phenice gripped a bit of Jasper's coat.

"Oh, don't," she said. "If anything happens to you, you know it must to me too."

## *BOOK VI.*

### THE HEART OF THE WOMAN.

Oh what to me the little room
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest?
He bade me out into the gloom
And my breast lies upon his breast.

Oh what to me my mother's care,
The house where I was safe and warm?
The shadowy blossom of my hair
Will hide us from the bitter storm.

—*W. B. Yeats.*

I would that you were all to me,
  You that are just so much, no more.
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
  Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?

—*R. Browning.*

Some day we shall see beckoning
  A spire over the hill;
A Church beyond our reckoning,
  One Church still.

It will be dark when we get there,
  With a dim light inside;
The lych-gate open set there,
  The west door open wide.

. . . . .

Illa hora admonebor;
  The present is as the past.
Tuum Vultum intuebor,
  In that Church last.

—*J. Meade Falkner.*

# I.

THE wind was tearing across the wide, unsheltered plains of La Beauce, sweeping the dust in eddying clouds and making the road toilsome to two wayfarers who, with heads bent against the blast, were journeying toward the town; to one, at least, who fell behind with ever-lagging step. The lithe figure of the man, though burdened with the awkward bulk of a harp slung across his shoulders by a leathern strap, pressed forward, his bent head alone showing that he felt the resistance, but the woman toiled after him with flagging gait, weariness and discouragement in her whole mien.

The wind caught at the brown cape she wore and whirled it about her head, slapping her cheeks with corners of it, now this side and now that; anon snatching with impudent fingers at the short strands of hair that escaped from under the edge of her woollen Tam-o'-Shanter and driving them into her eyes.

She uttered no complaint, only now and again looked deprecatingly, as a loving dog might do, when her husband checked his stride and looked back impatiently.

"Go you on," she said by and by; "never mind me. I'll come soon. I think I really must rest a bit; this wind is taking all the strength out of my legs."

He came back then with compunction and helped her down the bank, for the causeway was slightly raised, that she might rest her back against it and get, if it might be, an atom of shelter.

"You used to be such a valiant comrade, Phenie," he said, half compassionate, half reproachful; "such a famous walker, never tired. I can't think what has come to you."

She turned her face away and plucked at the little wide-eyed daisies that starred the grass beside her. She had been flagging lately and she knew it worried him. Till now she had always been equal to anything, or, if he wanted to extend his rambles beyond her powers, cheerfully ready to take care of herself till he came again, never a clog upon his restless movements; but now that she was less able to encounter fatigue, she had grown nervous about being left. Soon the time would come when she should no longer be able to tramp day long beside him, but as long as she could keep up she would not flinch. She knew well that, if she told him, he would not ask it of her, but that was just what she dreaded.

She kept promising herself that when they came to some place that seemed to take his fancy she would plead for a little rest, to settle down just for a short while, but the right place seemed to recede before her like the rainbow, always in the next field. As her powers waned his restlessness waxed. Ah! if she were only in England now, living in some small, quiet home; looking forward to what, under other circumstances, would have been so great a joy to her. Alas! now it was only a dread. Yet other women lived

these strange vagabond lives and bore children and kept up: if they could, she could.

A few weeks ago, crossing the hill country in the midst of Brittany, they had spent an evening at a wayside inn in company with a pedlar and his wife, who wandered from hamlet to hamlet with their wares in a covered cart. The two women had compared their experiences of a roving life. "*Ah, que vous avez de chance!*" had been the exclamation of the pedlar's wife on learning that Phenice had no children—and she had the cart to travel in.

Meanwhile Jasper had wandered to a little distance, and, taking his fiddle from its case, began to play fitful tunes. This wind made him restless. Sometimes he would lie at her feet for hours, dozing and dreaming, when they stopped to rest, but to-day he could not be still. The melody came to her in broken snatches, torn into fragments by the wind, and presently drowned, for into the midst of it from afar, out of the sky, it seemed, fell a clanguor of wild bells, now borne to her ear with a rush, now blown wide.

"Hark!" she cried. "What is that?"

He stopped playing. "The cathedral bells," he said. He came back and put the fiddle away again. "Courage! we are but ten minutes from the town. One struggle more, and then rest and dinner. You shall sleep in a bed to-night, poor wife."

She stood up. "I am ready; I am quite rested now."

He took the fiddle-case and her little knapsack, as well as his own share of burdens; he was always so

kind, when he thought of it; he only forgot sometimes that he was not alone; and they set forward once more, till suddenly he laid his hand upon her arm and said, "Look!"

She had been walking with head down, seeing nothing beyond the dusty ruts and the stones in her pathway, but now she looked up in the direction of the flying bell-music.

Against the grey March sky rose a mass of deeper grey, towering above the clustered roofs of the town; fretted into pinnacles and flying buttresses, rich with tracery and moulding. As it stood upon the height, uplifted, with its two fair, diverse spires springing into the light, nothing could have been more unlike the long, grave bulk of Dronechester crouching in the valley; yet something clutched Phenice's heart, for she thought of the turn in the road where you first caught sight of the old cathedral, as you came over the hill. There was the same majesty, the same aloofness, the same abiding witness to things unseen.

Tired as she was, she stood still to gaze.

"That is Chartres," said Jasper. "The only building made with hands where I ever felt I could worship God better than on the bare hillside."

They went on again till they reached the square, and turned down a narrow side-street, where they presently lost sight of the soaring spires, and turned in at the hospitable door of the Cerf aux Ailes.

Phenice was too weary to rest. The little inn was clean and quiet, and after a cup of bouillon—which really did her more good than the tea she craved would have done—she lay down outside the coarse,

sweet-smelling sheets and pulled the down quilt over her. It was no good; she might as well have been walking still, for any repose she got. Tormenting fancies surged through her overwearied brain, dread of what might come upon her in her wanderings by unsheltered ways, morbid fears of becoming a burden to Jasper, a misgiving that she was growing fretful and complaining and he would weary of her. She fought against a sense of strangeness in him, a notion she had always had, yet sometimes lost sight of; that there was something uncanny, almost unhuman, in the queer being to whom she had linked her life. With it all a sudden homesickness, that had sprung up she knew not how or why; it all came over her with a sense of helpless impotence and kept her in a state of twittering wakefulness, through which she was conscious of an aching weariness down into the tip of each individual toe.

The very comfort of the room increased her woe; it was so quiet, so dim and cool, with closed jalousies, so unlike any place where she had lately harboured. Somehow in its clean homeliness it recalled her own little room at home; the small window looking into the heart of the pear-tree where the thrush had his nest; the deep window-seat and old, worn patchwork cushion; the limp, flowered chintz curtain that was hardly ever drawn; she could shut her eyes and see it all as though she had left but yesterday, and hear the unceasing chatter of the starlings in the eaves. By the bed used to stand the well-rubbed round mahogany table that had been her grandmother's, and on which her Bible always lay. She had almost put

out her hand to feel for it; then an agony of homesickness rushed over her and made her sob.

Yet would she go back, if she could? Would she, for any sickness or sorrow, cancel those years of wandering and put herself back into the old, safe, sheltered paths? Never! Had she not said when she left her home that she would follow Jasper to the world's end, and should she flinch? If there had been toil, fatigue, exposure, lack of those common surroundings that make the comfort of common lives, had there not been joys untold? Strange sights and wonderful experiences, wisdom in the lore that Nature only teaches to those who live with her, nearness to the heart of the great Mother Earth? Above all, the woman's chiefest joy in ministering to the man who is her world? If the sentence, "Thy desire shall be unto him" was laid on Eve as a curse, yet her daughters have found their deepest happiness therein. Could she but keep that, the rest might go. The dagger that turned in her heart was the fear lest he no longer needed her. Solitude had been his comrade always till he met her; sometimes it seemed that he still loved it best.

Her thoughts turned about and about; she could not lie still and bear it. She slipped from under the quilt and stood an instant with her shoeless feet upon the bare, well-rubbed boards, her heavy, brown hair lying uncoiled on her neck. Then she crossed the room with wavering steps to the window, and set the shutter back. Those bells again! How they seemed to call her. She would follow them; she was so tired that a little more or less could make no difference, and

it could not be far, they sounded in her ears so loud. She poured water into the little narrow basin and bathed her face and eyes, coiled her hair afresh, and put on the dark-blue serge gown, the rough tweed cape, and knitted Tam-o'-Shanter that was always her travelling garb.

Outside her door a red-headed youth, who combined in his person the offices of waiter, chambermaid, and boots, was skating up and down the passage in what looked like clogs of which the soles were doormats, bringing a higher polish to the already shining boards. At her question he slipped his feet out of them and pattered down the stairs and out upon the pavement in his stockings, to show her the way. She peeped into the open door of the coffee-room as she passed, to see if Jasper might have come in, but it was not likely; he never stayed under a roof if he could help it. It was quiet and deserted, the midday pipes had been smoked and the glasses of absinthe disposed of long ago; the freshly sanded floor bore no trace of a footstep, and she followed her guide into the street.

The lofty spires of the cathedral were not to be seen; the street where the inn stood was steep and twisting, and the gables and chimney-stacks took off all view. Her boarding-school French was hardly equal to grappling with the complicated directions the red-headed lad poured volubly forth for her guidance, and the gestures of the rapid hands rather bewildered than helped her. She seldom had much use for foreign languages since Jasper was always her interpreter; so, although so travelled, she had picked up but little.

She walked on, however, taking the turns she imagined had been pointed out to her, till she found she had been going round in a circle and was coming to the square again. There seemed nobody about to ask, so she crossed it hesitatingly.

Just then the sound of merry music came to meet her. A narrow alley debouched into the square, and along the middle of it a wedding procession came marching by. At its head stepped Jasper, going lightly over the cobblestones with his long, swinging gait, his head thrown back, his brown hair blowing up over the brim of his soft felt hat; his fiddle was at his shoulder, and as he walked he played a fantastic measure, woven of scraps of Grieg's rustic wedding, threaded with ancient Breton songs. Behind him came the bride and bridegroom carrying huge nosegays, their friends following arm in arm, a goodly train. Phenice drew back into a doorway as they passed. Jasper never saw her; his brown eyes were in a mist, and he passed her by, unheeding.

In the mood she was in to-day it was another stab. That he could be near her unaware seemed to carry to her the conviction that she could never be to him what he was to her. It seemed to her impossible that he should ever be near her and she not know it.

Well, she might go where she would; she would not see him for hours, most likely. Nothing amused him more than to drop with his fiddle into the lives of the country folk on these festive occasions, like a stranger from another planet; to play for their merrymakings, to mix in their talk, to pick up queer tales, and then to vanish.

Phenice generally tried to accommodate herself to it, but she never could quite understand it; the lonely wanderings she too loved, but to go marching through the streets with this riff-raff, to sit smoking and drinking with them in some cabaret, still shocked her home-bred notions. Not that Jasper was ever drunk; coarse temptations had no more power over him than over a will-o'-the-wisp; she had never that dread anxiety to meet, and with that she must e'en be content.

She shrewdly concluded that the wedding party were probably on their way from the cathedral, so she went by the road it had come. The bells had ceased now, so she could not guess if she were going right as she followed a high wall with snapdragon on the top of it, over which she could see nothing; then the lofty houses fell back round a broad open space, across which the wind was whirling clouds of dust and bits of paper. She stood a moment, getting her breath, then lifted her eyes to the crowd of sculptured saints above and around the great west doorway. In the midst was the figure of the Son of Man, seated, calm, compassionate, with pitying gaze falling on those who passed in and out.

She bent her head and pushed the leathern-covered door. As it swung to heavily behind her she stepped into the shadow of a great, enfolding peace. Out of the turmoil into the hush; out of the cold, hard light of the blustering March afternoon into the warm dimness where the light fell softly through the jewelled maze of crimson and gold, sapphire and amber. Yet the stillness was not lonely: here was no bare, deserted church where God was only to be found once

a week; far up the dim aisles little points of crimson light spoke of a worship that never ceased, and the quiet figures that moved about the great space or knelt here and there alone before some side altar had come to pray, not to gape. She would fain have followed their example, but her English shyness withheld her. Besides, had she any right? Was she not an intruder, an alien?

She stole softly on, venturing a timid glance here and there, trying to understand the world-story in sculptured stone and painted glass that was unrolled before her eyes, and fearing lest her light footfall might disturb those praying figures. But no one heeded her, and presently she reached the retro-choir, where she found herself alone and looked about her with less shyness.

Even in this dusky arcade behind the choir, where few eyes would ever rest upon his work, the mediæval sculptor had not disdained to put forth all his skill to depict the story of the Blessed Virgin in a series of quaint and homely scenes. He had not, as his successor of to-day would have done, laboured to set forth his subject with all the correct accessories of life in Judea under the Roman Empire,—thereby putting the story far away in time and place from the sympathies of homely folk,—but had represented each stage of the narrative just as it might have occurred in his own home, among his own people, and so in its simplicity and naturalness it was true for all time.

The solitary, anxious woman who went slowly from one scene to the next was moved to smiles, now and then almost to a little tender laugh at the homely

quaintness of detail, but before one, and that one of the oddest, she lingered long with a lump rising in her throat. St. Joseph has fallen asleep in his chair while beside him the Blessed Mother sits, her head bent over her sewing, her eyes full of that pondering with which she kept all things in her heart.

By and by she had reached the end of the story, and was glad to seat herself in the shadow of a great column and rest a while. The twilight was deepening, and the gathering gloom made more visible a mass of light, colour, and soft glitter in a transept hard by, round which a quiet stir and movement of figures, chiefly women, was going on. A little group constantly changing, constantly renewed, knelt in front, letting their beads drop through their hands as their lips moved. The light of a hundred tapers fell on a mass of white flowers—marguerites, for the time of lilies was not yet—and above, dim in the golden haze, was the figure of a woman, crowned, bearing in her arms a Child.

Strange, archaic, unbeautiful, it yet did not repel Phenice. She saw in it the symbol of motherhood, sanctified by the incense of worship and heart's devotion. She left her seat and stole softly nearer. She longed to join herself to those praying figures. Timidly she took one of the low kneeling-chairs on the outermost fringe of the group. Just before her knelt a young peasant woman, poorly and thinly clad, with a heavy basket which she had set down on the ground beside her, and two little children, a boy and girl, kneeling hand in hand, their wide eyes raised in wondering admiration of the tinsel glitter above them.

The thought crossed Phenice's mind how shocked Mr. Biddlecombe would have been if anyone had dared to bring a market basket into the church at Hampage. But here everyone seemed to bring their burdens, their everyday life, their weekday cares, into the very presence of the Most High.

Phenice had knelt rather out of an instinctive reverence toward the worship of those about her than with any definite intention of prayer, yet presently the loneliness in her heart formed itself into the words, "Mother of Pity, have pity on me, too." Then she pulled herself up. What was she doing? Was it right? Was she worshipping an image, as Mr. Biddlecombe would have said, or a woman; putting someone, something, between her soul and God? Yet God seemed very near her, and to the Divine Child, the Man of Sorrows, she could address her prayer.

She was perplexed; she could not dogmatise; yet of one thing her simple soul was very sure: here was sorrowful, helpless humanity seeking the aid of the unseen.

The dusk gathered more and more. One by one the people near her stole away. Some paused whispering for a few minutes in the confessional close by before they passed out, and still she knelt on. Her weariness had passed into a condition of dreamy stillness in which she was not aware of the flight of time. She was roused presently by a little tap on her shoulder, and looked up to meet a pair of kindly, observant eyes bent upon her, as though trying to recognise her through the dusk. By his soutane and tonsured head she saw he was a priest.

"You are waiting to confess?"

The question was in French, but Phenice could understand it. Dazed as she was for a moment her brain refused to act, and instead of answering she stared at him stupidly.

"You are not quite ready?" he went on. "The time is already past and in ten minutes the church will be closed. I will wait for you yet a few moments, or will you come to-morrow?"

She shook her head.

"You are a stranger?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"Ah!" The "monsieur" enlightened him. "You are not *des notres?*"

"No, monsieur; I am English."

He paused a moment in silence, regarding her; reading her rather with the keen eyes of a physician of souls. Then he spoke to her in English, slowly but with precision:

"Yes; but you are ill? in distress? Is it not?"

She hardly knew how to answer him. She rose unsteadily from the kneeling posture in which he had found her, and stumbled a little, gripping the back of the chair for support.

"Not ill, monsieur, thank you; only very, very tired. We walked this morning from—oh, I forget the name of the place. Fifteen miles from here it must be; I don't know how to say it in kilomètres."

"Come with me," he said with brusque imperiousness, and strode toward a little door in the north transept.

She followed him obediently, not dreaming of re-

fusing. They issued on a wide green close, surrounded by imposing-looking buildings with mansard roofs and long rows of windows. It was very unlike an English close with well-shaved lawns and detached family houses; the grass was coarse and ill-kept, the shrubbery rank and straggling, and between the flags of the pathway the weeds sprouted, but in the high trees that overshadowed it the homing rooks were cawing just as they used to caw in the limes at Dronechester. Her guide, whose black soutane flapped against the undergrowth, led the way to a small door in a corner of the long range of building, not the main front entrance, and entering signed her to follow up an uncarpeted stair and into a room which looked to her almost unfurnished; there was no carpet but a little strip by the stove, a deal table so crowded with books that the inkstand had to find room on the narrow top of the bureau, two rush-bottomed chairs, one with arms, one without, and in the corner a prie-dieu standing before a large black-and-silver crucifix.

He turned the armchair round to the stove for her, then, going to the door, called "Babette, Babette!" in a ringing tone.

A clattering footstep in sabots came swiftly along the passage in answer, and a little fat Frenchwoman in a blue apron appeared in the doorway.

"A wineglass, Babette, and a piece of bread, if you please."

Phenice tried to say that she wanted nothing, but a wave of his hand silenced her, and the faintness she had felt in church was coming over her again. The priest turned away and, unlocking the bureau, took

from its lower receptacle a bottle of red wine, which he placed upon the table just as Babette returned with the glass and a galette on a coarse, gaily-painted plate.

He poured the wine and held it to her. "Drink this," he said in an authoritative tone, "and then we will talk." And obeying him, she found her faculties revive and the sense of being in a dream pass gradually away.

He had been taking something else from the bureau, and now approached her with an old-fashioned netted silk purse fringed with steel beads in his hand.

"Is it money?" he asked abruptly.

She put out her hand deprecatingly. "Oh, no, no! You are very good. But no, it is not money; we have enough."

"We? You are not then alone?"

"No, monsieur; I am travelling with my husband."

"In search of work? What is he?"

She looked up in his face. "I don't know." And a sob caught her breath. He waited. There was more to come, and he felt he should only confuse her with questions. In a minute she spoke again.

"That was true in the spirit, but not in the letter. By profession—if he has one—he is a strolling fiddler; we wander about and play when he has a mind; sometimes he takes money for playing, often not. He has a little money, besides, from one of his relations; we are rarely in need."

"*Tiens!* he is then an *homme de biens,* a gentleman?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

He put the tips of his fingers together and thought. Most men would have jumped at once to the conclusion that she was an ill-used wife, but the father, for all his simplicity, had the trained insight of one used to dealing with souls. He did not think it was ill-usage that had brought that strained look to her face.

She went on without further question. "He is very good to me; you must not fancy, because I was crying in church, that I am not happy. Only sometimes I feel as if I had married a kelpie or a will-o'-the-wisp, and I have no one else in the wide world but only him."

"Your own people?"

"They cast me off because I would have him. And now sometimes—oh, I don't know how I come to be talking like this to a stranger."

"And now you have found that not the dearest in all the world, not the closest earthly tie, can satisfy the longing heart. So you brought your sorrow and loneliness into the presence of the One who can fill the hungry soul with goodness. That was well done."

"Though I am not of your church," she said softly, "it seemed like a home there."

"I do not doubt that God is leading you, my daughter, though it be by steep ways. I wish I could have helped you," he added as she rose to go.

"You have," she said, "by showing me the kindness for the stranger and the sad that God has put into the world. Will you give me your blessing, *mon père?*"

He did so, and as she stepped out into the twilight he said, "I shall remember you in my prayers, my daughter. We shall probably never meet again here, but I shall expect to see you in the Land where there will be One Fold and One Shepherd."

## II.

BARS of warm, ruddy light lay across the dark, narrow street, falling from the uncurtained window of the Cerf aux Ailes. It looked like a welcome to Phenice as she picked her solitary way over the cobblestones. The half-open swing door was nearly filled by the portly figure of madame, who stood looking up the street, rolling her arms in her apron for warmth—"Just as an Englishwoman would do," said Phenice to herself.

"My husband has not come in, I suppose?"

The *patronne* shook her head very slowly from side to side. "It is much if you see him this side midnight," she said ominously. "Antoine!"

There was never any need of a bell to summon the red-headed serving man; he seemed to spring out of the ground at the first call. In the twinkling of an eye he stood before his mistress, shaking his amber curls.

"Antoine, inform madame where you saw *M. le mari.*"

"I ran down to the Trois Couronnes for change for a five-franc piece, and there stood monsieur in the doorway, fiddling for the dancers. Ah, but how drunk they were!"

"But not my husband," she asserted proudly.

Antoine shrugged his shoulders and turned out the palms of his hands.

"*Que sais-je?* He was fiddling like the devil."

"Ah, these husbands! *Mais ils sont méchants tous, tous, tous!*" And *la patronne* turned into the house, smoothing down her apron.

"But not mine, madame," said Phenice, following her down the passage, and casting about desperately for French words wherewith to combat these aspersions on Jasper. "He likes to make music for the poor when they cannot afford to pay for any for their merry-makings, but he never drinks, never."

"You are quite right to defend him, my child, and perhaps you believe it. That will last for a little while. They get married and they say they have ranged themselves—for a little. But after all they are men, and when you have said that you have said all."

Yet perhaps, thought the lonely wife, the lot of this smiling, rubicund woman, with her cheerfully pessimistic philosophy, was the harder. Aloof, perplexing as Jasper might sometimes be, she never had to blush for him nor to take to her soul the bitter consolation that "men were all alike."

"It's a bitter cold wind to-night," said the good woman, rubbing her hands. "Shall I light you a morsel of fire in the stove? Or stay—suppose you come and sit with me, and have your bit of supper in there. The bar parlour is full of men, and 'twould be lonesome for a decent woman like you amongst them."

Phenice accepted the proposition gratefully, and

presently, when she was established in a warm corner by the stove, she drew out her knitting needles and her grey-blue yarn, for she kept the feet of her tramp always well clad.

"Well," cried the hostess presently, looking up from the column of figures she was adding up, "I don't know as I ever saw a woman of your sort sit down to a bit of work before—not," she added, "that they come much my way. I don't take tramping folk in general, but I could see you were another sort, and I will say for your husband he has a kind of way with him——"

She paused, leaving an opening for Phenice to put in any explanatory remarks, but she did not avail herself of it; she was well used to people finding Jasper a mystery—used, too, to their recognising that he had "a way with him" that made it impossible to refuse him shelter wherever he chose to ask it, though often it was granted with a kind of apologetic declaration that they did not take such people in general.

Madame put away her account books presently and came and sat beside Phenice; admiring the length of sock that had grown under her nimble fingers, and drawing out many curious stories of her wandering life.

She proved quite right in her prophecy of the lateness of Jasper's return. She had tucked her guest with her own motherly hands into the high wooden bedstead and covered her with a mountainous pile of feathers, and had seen her fall asleep after a hot tisane she administered, before there was a sign of him.

Early in the morning Phenice opened her eyes to see the sunshine falling across her bed, and heard the busy chattering of swallows in the eaves. The window stood wide open and so did the shutter, and she was quite sure that the careful hostess who had seen her to bed would not have left them so; moreover the big down quilt had been tossed contemptuously into a corner, and a slight dint in the pillow showed where a head had rested. Jasper's light movements rarely disturbed her, and in the winter nights, when he did consent to sleep in a bed, he was always off by the first glint of dawn.

Sunday morning, and everyone going the same way. She would go, too. She had been standing out upon the pavement, looking up and down the street, wondering what had become of Jasper, and whether they would have to resume their journey. She fetched her hat and followed past the shuttered shops. The people did not seem to be entering by the great door she had gone in at yesterday, but one after another turned aside to a low, arched doorway close to some iron railings, through which she could see the great neglected garden she had crossed. She followed down a long, steep flight of steps, through dim, low vaulted aisles that seemed interminable. So dark was it that she would have been almost afraid to go on but that two or three vaguely seen figures were in front of her, and she kept them in sight.

Light at last, but not the light of morning. Clustered tapers shimmering through the haze of fragrant smoke that rose in puffs as the censers swung; from the low, heavy vaults hanging lamps casting an uncer-

tain glow on the ranks of kneeling figures, and lost presently in the shadows at the far end.

Phenice found a chair and knelt behind the rest, unable to follow with her mind what was going on, her spirit none the less hushed to an awed reverence. At the ringing of a bell all heads were bent as though a wind passed over a cornfield, and hers went down with the rest. Then one and another left their seats and went softly up the aisle. As the row immediately before her became vacant, and she raised her head for a moment, her eyes fell on a slight figure a few seats in front that made her heart give a throb. "How silly I am!" she said to herself. "My eyes and my heart are so full of Jasper that I think I see him everywhere." Then the vista closed up as the worshippers returned to their places.

As she was crossing the square on her way back she started, for a light hand was suddenly laid on her shoulder. "Rested yet, wife?"

That was all he said, but to her there were volumes of comfort in the tone.

"Quite, and ready to go on just when you please."

"I think," he said slowly, "I had better leave you here a day or two yet."

She stood stock-still in the middle of the square and gripped his arm with both hands.

"Leave me! Oh, Jasper, no!"

He looked down at her. "Did you think I was going to desert you?" he said.

They walked on a few yards in silence. Presently he spoke again.

"*La patronne* at the Cerf aux Ailes has been giving

me a piece of her mind. She evidently thinks me a ne'er-do-weel, if not a wife-beater."

Phenice broke in: "Jasper, you don't think I complained?"

He turned his head and looked down into her eyes.

"Of course not. If I were to throw you over the cliff I don't believe you would complain, faithfullest of women and followers. But you shouldn't have let me be a brute to you."

"I was afraid," faltered Phenice, "you would be vexed. I hate to be a clog."

"It complicates matters rather; I wanted—well, never mind. Look here, this woman seems to be a good soul; should you mind stopping here for a bit, and I would come and go?"

"Not with her," said Phenice firmly; "she doesn't understand."

"Does anyone? Well, let me go off for to-day and think things over, and we will see. I will come back, I promise you."

They had reached the inn door, and despite the presence of the red-headed youth who was scrubbing the steps, he stooped his head and gave her one of his rare kisses.

"Go in and get your coffee."

He waved his hand, and in a minute had disappeared down the street.

It was characteristic of her and of the relation between them that she never asked him whether he had been at the Mass, or if her sight of him had been her own fancy.

Very characteristic of her, too, was the way in which

she accepted the waiting part assigned her. Her husband chose to go, and she asked him neither why nor whither; she was to remain, so, since that was his wish, she sat cheerfully by the window that looked down the street, and her knitting needles never ceased to click. If many days passed, Jasper would get more pairs of socks than he could carry about with him. She washed and mended carefully her own and her husband's small stock of garments, and in the evenings sang sometimes to her harp, to the intense delight of madame and her nimble coadjutor. For their benefit she recalled some old-fashioned ditties she had found long ago among her mother's dusty piles of music: "On the Banks of Allan Water," or "Ben Bolt." Then she took to helping madame with her book-keeping, or about the house in many little ways. In the dusk she would cross the wide square, and creep into the solemn hush of the great cathedral; sometimes kneeling for half an hour before the tall, black crucifix, sometimes wandering round, marvelling at the jewelled splendour of the windows. Her kind friend she never saw again; just those days he was absent on some mission. So many days slipped by.

Then came a market day when business had been brisk, and Phenice was in the pantry, washing glasses and counting spoons: suddenly in rushed Antoine in great excitement.

"*Tiens, madame; voilà monsieur qui arrive!*"

In a flash she was down the tiled passage and out at the door just as Jasper sauntered up to it, leading a tall grey ass by the bridle.

"Well, Phenie," he said, as if he had but walked off that morning, "what do you think of my purchase? It took me some time to find one to suit; I had to ramble quite down to the south before I could find one that would do at all. At last I met this one in a pedlar's cart: the pedlar was in misfortune, poor fellow, and about to retire from business. He seemed a good sort; I don't think she has been ill-treated. She is a bit low-spirited, but her temper is very even, and if she is slow we are in no particular hurry. Her name, by the by, is Marie-Rose."

The beast seemed to know she was being talked of, for she turned her long, grave face to her new mistress, and graciously allowed her forehead to be stroked and her huge hairy ears to be fondled.

*La patronne* had followed and stood in the doorway, throwing up her hands.

"Just Heavens! Does monsieur then intend that madame should ride that obstinate and pig-headed animal? Has he then peradventure fallen from the stars, and is not aware that there are trains and diligences from Chartres to all parts? Or is he about to take a journey to the moon?"

Phenice laughed as she pulled the long, soft ears through her hands.

"I shall do very well. I like riding donkeys, and we are not going to gallop."

At daybreak they were on the road again, Phenice habited in a large plaid shawl which the *patronne* wrapped carefully about her feet.

## III.

The broad sweep of moorland lay smiling under the April sunshine, every undulation clothed with a close-fitting garment of gorse like cloth of gold, and the low places between dim with a blue mist of wild hyacinths; the air was pungent with the clean, quick smell of the prickly shoots and crisp with the salt breath of the sea. Far to the west a belt of shimmering blue pulsed gently against the indented coast-line, and out of it rose a group of islands large and small; some a mere rocky perch for the sea-birds, some holding a little space of field and orchard out of reach of the hungry sea, with here and there a white dot or a sharp spire.

Along a grassy track toward the sea travelled our wayfarers, the large grey ass stepping sedately along, accommodating her pace to Jasper's swinging stride as he walked at the bridle. Phenice, with the plaid shawl draped habit-wise over her feet, and the fiddle laid across her lap, rode silently; her mind occupied with a vague wonder what their goal might be, but content, as always, to leave it to Jasper.

The wide silence held a murmuring of life in its heart; the hum of bees, the vociferous scolding of a pair of stone-chats that flickered from crest to crest of the gorse-bushes, praying the intruders not to observe where their nest was; the lonely cry of a curlew,

like a lost soul, wheeling far above in the immensity of the sky. Often they travelled like this, without a word, for miles through Nature's speaking silence. Presently Phenice broke it.

"This puts me in mind of Zuleika and the road to Broussa. Poor Zuleika!"

He did not answer; he seldom did, and she went on: "It is better, though, on this proper saddle without that queer old peak, and without the harp, too."

For the harp had been left behind at Chartres, at the Cerf aux Ailes. Jasper would fetch it when it was wanted again.

The remembrance of Zuleika led her thoughts back to Anastasie and Lulu, and their more sociably nomad life. She hankered sometimes for the society of another woman, especially now. She wondered what had become of them. It was years since she waited with them at the foot of Olympus. Perhaps by this time they had returned to the world—the smart world, very likely, if their husbands had climbed many rungs on the ladder of fame. She had never heard of them since: she and Jasper never troubled their heads with the newspapers.

The moor seemed an infinity; it was surely a long while since they had passed a house; it really seemed as if they might go on and on for ever, but at last there was a little puff of blue smoke arising from a dip before them, presently a chimney came in view, the dip widened into a combe going down to the sea, and the cart-track was presently exchanged for a steep, stony street, down which Marie-Rose picked her way warily. There were more houses, thick-walled,

small-windowed, quite a little town; in the midst a square with a granite church at one side of it, and under a big tree a well and a trough of water at which women were sociably washing clothes. Here they paused a few moments to give Marie-Rose a drink, but this was not their goal, for Jasper took the bridle again and led her on, still down the street, till they reached a little quay and a jetty, within which some heavy fishing cobles were moored. Here at length Jasper halted, and lifted his wife from the saddle.

"Bid Marie-Rose good-bye," he said. "We can't take her further with us."

"Why, where are we going?" cried Phenice with her arm round the donkey's neck.

He pointed laconically toward the sunset, in the shimmer of which the islands looked like transparent amethyst.

"Sit you there on the quay a few minutes," he said, "while I take her where she'll be looked after."

Phenice kissed her on her hairy forehead and even on her soft nose, and watched her being led dumbly away.

Presently she found herself, her bundle, and the fiddle transferred to one of the boats, that had been rocking in the little harbour; Jasper took his seat beside her, a brown sail was hoisted, and they were making their way through the gurgling swish of the water to the broad red pathway that led out to the west. As they drew near and nearer the amethyst grew solid, took shape, a short white light-house was seen to starboard, a rocky coast stood out in front of them, houses detached themselves from the green back-

ground, one especially, long and dazzling white with rows of narrow windows high up, and presently they reached another little quay like the one they had left, where fishermen in blue jerseys sat lazily smoking, with their backs against the wall.

Here, instead of going up the street, they took their way up a steep path that was cut in the cliff and led them straight to the white-washed walls they had seen from afar.

"Is it a convent?" asked Phenice, looking up at the reserved-looking yet curtainless windows.

"Yes," said Jasper. "It is called Notre Dame de Bon Secours. The nuns have a kind of hospice here for travellers and for sick folk. I was here a month once when I broke my leg, and they were awfully good to me."

"Are we going to stay here?"

"We? Well, I shall stop till to-morrow and see you settled. They'll take good care of you till you are fit to travel again."

He pulled the bell as he spoke, and after reconnoitering them through a grating, the portress admitted them into a little square room like an office, close to the door, where presently the Mother Superior came to interview them.

She recognised Jasper instantly.

"Why, M. Jasper," she cried, "you have been a long time fulfilling your promise. Ten years, isn't it, since we mended that compound fracture of yours? You have got married in the meantime apparently," and she held out a kind hand to Phenice.

She was a portly woman, whose broad cheeks

showed red and fresh against the dazzling white wimple that hid every strand of hair. Her blue eyes were kind, her mouth was firm. She looked more like the mother of a large family than a cloistered nun, and Phenice felt quite at home with her.

The arrangement was soon made; Phenice was to board in the *dépendance*, where as yet there were but few guests, for the time of summer visitors was not yet, and Jasper would come and go. Her surprise was great to see him draw out from his vest a little leather pouch full of English sovereigns.

"I hope you do not mind taking English gold, *ma mère?*" he said. "It was more convenient to bring it in this way."

He must surely have been to England to fetch it then, before he went south to buy Marie-Rose.

Mère Thérèse summoned another sister to take Phenice to the room that would be assigned her. Though it was all so fresh and clean with whitewash as to look almost new at the first glance, the buildings in reality were very old. They went out at a low, arched doorway and across a flagged courtyard; then another archway led into a cloister full of graves with little wooden crosses and wreaths of immortelles, then out into a sunny orchard close garlanded with pink blossom, from which a flight of steps led up to a terrace garden and the modern *dépendance* where the guest-rooms were.

The windows here were not quite so high nor so narrow as those of the convent itself, and looked away across the sea where more islands lay like a flock of dolphins, with many a white light-house tower guard-

ing the reefs, which ran out white and seething beyond the farthest of them. The rooms were clean, orderly, bare, and at this moment very empty; only a French family of four and some Russians with a German "Mamsell" sat at the long guest table; the nuns eat in their own refectory across the orchard, and had lives of the saints read aloud to them while they were at dinner.

"I think you'll be all right here," said Jasper, swinging his hat restlessly, and looking round upon the prim arrangements of Phenice's little room. "You like this sort of thing; don't you? The sisters will be awfully good to you, and you will be very happy."

"I shall try to be," said Phenice wistfully, holding to the lappet of his coat and trying to keep her underlip from trembling. "But where are you going?"

"Oh, not far; I shall come and go. I made an arrangement with 'Jean Bart,' as they call the old fellow that brought us over, to take me to the fishing grounds for a week or two. You'll almost be able to watch me from the window."

To one who for years past had led a rambling life, seeing every day fresh scenes, rarely speaking to the same people two days running, nor sleeping two nights in the same bed, the daily round at Notre Dame de Bon Secours must needs seem strangely monotonous. "You like this sort of thing?" Jasper had coolly said to his wife, remembering that she had on some weary days, though not often, sighed for home, and forgetting how completely he had broken her of the habit of that ordered life. Besides exist-

ence at the farm, with the live creatures to see to, the various small emergencies to deal with as they arose, was eventful compared to this still routine, without duties, without responsibilities, broken into equal fragments by the unfailing sound of the convent bell.

In that free life she had been used to sleep when she would, under the shade of trees mayhap in the noonday heat, often under the stars; had rested when her feet were weary, had eaten when she hungered and drank when she was thirsty; now she must rise, pray, eat, sleep, according to the summons of that little bell. Had she no appetite? It was dinner-time; she must at least sit at the table and have food placed upon her plate. Did she hanker to roam in the moonlight along the edge of the cliff? It was nine o'clock, and all must be shut and locked for the night. Her one occupation was to sit in the window of her own room, which looked out over the sea, sewing small white garments, and ever and anon letting her needle rest idle while her eyes wandered away; wondering which of the brown sails on the offing belonged to the boat in which her heart was rocking on the waves.

Jasper came often, as he had promised, and found her always cheerful and serene. The nuns were kindness itself, she said, especially Mère Thérèse, and the other people pleasant enough in their way.

Then came a day when he arrived with an eager light in his eyes and an alert look in every line of his spare person.

"Wife, do you think you could spare me for a few weeks? Such a chance!"

"What is it?"

"Why, old 'Jean Bart's' brother-in-law has broken his leg, and the old boy says I could ship in his place on a whaler which goes north the day after to-morrow. Everybody is caught up by this time, and they must have an extra hand. He has worked for that owner for years; he is pretty sure he could arrange it."

"To be gone all summer?"

"Oh, I could get back before you wanted me: I could always take a steamer, you know."

He watched her for a moment, sitting so still, her head bent over her work, her fingers setting small, dainty stitches.

"I have always hankered after the midnight sun and the icebergs and the polar bears, and somehow the chance has never come my way before. Still, of course, if you feel you'd rather not be left——"

She was measuring one tuck against another very carefully, very accurately; when she had set in a pin to her mind she looked up with a smile in her eyes.

"Go, dearest; it will be much better. The sisters will take good care of me."

## IV.

Two days later she sat as usual sewing beside her window, which stood wide open. Below, through the branches, translucent in the sunshine, the wide expanse of sea dimpled under a light breeze. It seemed all alive this morning; the white sails were gathering together like a flock of huge birds. To-night the boats would go. Should she see Jasper first? she wondered. She hardly thought so; he hated leave-takings always. Last night he had stayed with her as late as the convent rules allowed, had been very sweet and tender to her, and then had got up and gone with characteristic abruptness. Better so, perhaps. But she was weak, and two tears rolled over her brown cheeks and dropped on the tiny shift she was making.

A quick tap at the door brought a bright flush to her face; she hastily dashed away the drops as she cried, "*Entrez!*" and started from her seat, but it was only a novice who entered; a pleasant, bright-faced Bretonne who had to do chiefly with the visitors in the *dépendance.*

"Madame is going to the Blessing, *n'est ce pas?*"

"To what?"

"To the Blessing of the Boats. It is on the mainland, where the great cross is. See, they are collecting from all the islands round."

"Oh, I should like to go, I will get ready." And Phenice hastily put up her work.

"The English meess who arrived last night wishes to go also. *Ces dames* desire to see everything. Make haste, madame; we will await you in the *cour*."

Phenice followed her quickly and found with her a young lady who had newly arrived at the convent, having been ordered sea air and complete rest for one of the nervous disorders the hurry of modern life makes so common. The patient, however, appeared resolved that her thirst for information at any rate should be allowed no rest. Her large eyes and *retroussé* nose seemed bent on investigating everything, reinforced by a remarkable pair of glasses at the end of a long tortoiseshell holder. She bent them on Phenice with a rather *intrigué* air; she found herself quite unable to classify her.

"Did you say her husband was going to the North Sea, whaling?" she was overheard to say as Phenice drew near.

"Hurry!" said the little novice, without replying to the question. "One boatload from here has gone across already."

The broad, heavy boat, that was waiting at the quay as they ran down the hill, was nearly filled with wives and mothers, sweethearts and little children. A couple of strong-armed women rowed it; nearly all the available men went with the fishing fleet in summer, except those who were doing their year's service in the navy.

As they went over Miss Potter catechised them as to the length of time the men would be absent, the

amount of their earnings, how the women would be supported in the meantime, and so forth; entering their answers in a neat little note-book. Phenice wondered how they could bear it, and when it came to an inquiry as to the usual percentage of loss, and the number of boats that might be expected to go down, she protested:

"You seem to forget," she said, "that these things are real; not just something to put in a book."

Miss Potter's round eyes grew a little rounder. "Real?" she said; "of course they are real; that is the very point, don't you see? If I write a book about it, as I very likely shall, I want to have all my facts correct."

Evidently to reprove Miss Potter was wasted breath. Phenice recognised the futility with a half smile, as she laid her hand tenderly on that of an old woman who had begun to cry.

"But you," said Miss Potter, putting up the long glasses and looking at her curiously, "you are not one of them? Didn't I see you at dinner last night?"

"Nevertheless I am one of them. Perhaps that is why I feel it," said Phenice.

The church was already crowded when they reached it. Miss Potter fought her way up as close to the altar rails as she could get, anxious to miss nothing, but Phenice, who rather dreaded the throng, drew back and sat upon a grave outside till the procession should come out.

The function in the church was not long; soon the crowd of stragglers in the porch were pushed aside, got out of the way somehow, chiefly by the efforts of

a beadle such as one used to see in English churches some half-century ago, who rapped recalcitrants on the head with a knobbed stick when there seemed no other way of clearing the road, and with some struggling and pushing the procession emerged. First a troop of chubby boys in red cassocks and lace-trimmed surplices, carrying large tapers wherewith they liberally bedewed the garments of those nearest them; then the crucifer; next the little girls two and two, the *filles de Marie*, in their white frocks and blue sashes, led by the black-gowned sisters; more acolytes and banners, and a gorgeous reliquary, all gold and gems, supposed to contain a bone of St. Lunaire or St. Enogat, or one of the patron saints of fisher folk, and lastly the priest with venerable white head and the shuffling steps of old age. Behind, the crowd fell in, reverent, devout; mothers making their little boys uncover, and all keeping silence as though they were in church. Phenice followed with the rest.

As they passed along she caught sight of Miss Potter sitting on a gate, sketching vigorously; she must have taken a short cut right through a field of rye.

Between the fields wound the road. Phenice kept her eyes bent down, but she could see the dusty, blue chicory and little red stars of shepherd's weather-glass that grew by the wayside; then out upon the open cliff top in the narrow tracks between the gorse. The way grew steep presently, and the little boys had to stop their shrill singing of the *Ave Maris Stella.* Now that the hymn had ceased she could hear the wail of the sea-gulls as they swept by, and the sound made

her sad. The novice made her way to her side, and took her hand. "It is too steep for you," she said, but Phenice shook her head and went on.

On a headland that ran far out to sea stood a lofty granite cross, and at its foot an altar had been erected. This was the goal of their pilgrimage; it was the last thing the sailors would see as they left the harbour, and the first to greet them on their return.

As they gained the eminence and looked down she could see a multitude of vessels at anchor, as close to each other as they could safely ride, and all within view of what was being done on their behalf, as well as within hearing of the bell that was rung at the *Tantum ergo*. To Phenice's unaccustomed eye they looked bewilderingly alike, but when her friend the novice had pointed out the *Alouette* at no great distance, her loving eye soon assured itself of Jasper in his blue jersey, so much longer and lanker and more lissome than his mates. He perched himself presently on the yard-arm, and his eyes were fixed on the convent windows that twinkled in the sunlight; he did not know that she was here.

Church Latin was still a mystery to Phenice; she followed with the heart rather than with the mind, but some sentences of the brief sermon, simple as suited homely folk, went home to her and gave her comfort, as she could see it did to those other women crowding round, to whom every summer, as it came, brought the same inevitable parting and anxiety.

While they were up there the wind had freshened and the tide was fair. Almost before the Benediction was concluded there began to be a movement, a busy

stirring to and fro on board the vessels, a setting of sails, a raising of anchors and, as the congregation came lingeringly down the slope, first one and then another sailed out of the bay.

"It is sad," remarked Miss Potter, as they settled themselves in the boat for the transit back to their island; "it is really sad to see how deep-rooted superstition is amongst these peasantry."

Then, as Phenice uttered an exclamation: "Oh, it doesn't matter; they don't understand English; not even little Sœur Aline. Eh! what? Why, you're a Protestant, aren't you?"

"I don't know," said Phenice. "Yes, I suppose I was brought up one."

By degrees the still life of the convent quieted her restlessness, and she began to accommodate herself to its routine. Often she found her way into the little chapel, where it seemed in no way remarkable that one should kneel and pray one's own prayers in silence. Small and whitewashed inside, nothing could have been more unlike the glories of Chartres, but to her it seemed the same; the same sense of perpetual Presence, of perpetual worship, the same enfolding peace, the same consciousness of joining with a vast unseen company.

Soon she said to the sisters that she should like to become a Catholic, but they demurred. She should receive instruction certainly, since she wished it, but she must make no decision till her husband came again. They spoke about her to the old abbé who was director to the convent, and he talked to her and lent her books. She read the books as she was bidden,

but she troubled her head in no wise with doctrines or difficulties: Infallibility, the doctrine of indulgences, worship of the saints vexed her not; she only felt that here was a home for weary souls which she would fain enter.

Even the queer little votive offerings and queerer inscriptions that hung round the shrine of Notre Dame de Bon Secours did not offend her. Superstition?—well, perhaps; but it was at any rate the recognition, oddly expressed maybe, of a power above themselves, unseen, dimly conceived, who had brought them through danger and difficulty and granted them their heart's desire. The little model of a whaler hanging from the roof always carried her thoughts out to the vessel in which, somewhere, her beloved was tossing among the icebergs.

So the weeks wore on. Jasper had talked of returning by steamer, but he did not come. It might have been difficult to get away from many causes; more likely than not he was quite oblivious of the flight of time.

So, when her hour of peril came and he was still away, they could thwart her no longer. The abbé was sent for in haste and received her and her little new-born daughter into the fold.

It was full summer when the baby came, but the little thing looked as if she belonged rather to February than to June, wee and white and frail as a snowdrop; a great contrast to the lusty brown boy, ready to take the road like his father, that she had looked forward to. Often, as she lay watching the sunlight reflected from the dancing sea upon the whitewashed

wall above her bed, Phenice wondered how so tender a life would prosper on the rough ways she meant soon to tread again. Sheltered in her mother's arm, perhaps she would not feel the wind and the rain.

"Oh, she will grow and thrive and be a hearty woman yet, like her mother," Mère Thérèse would say encouragingly; "and before winter you must get your husband to settle down."

Settling down seemed far enough off at present, for Jasper had not yet got back from the whaling. The summer weeks slipped on; the harvest fields grew golden, stood in shocks, turned to bare stubble; the boats began to arrive, and a concourse of watching women gathered together on the quay. Sometimes Phenice made one of them; more often, with little Ellen on her arm, she would climb a height above the convent from which she could see farther, and catch an earlier glimpse of a sail coming up from the under-world.

How often she sped down to reach the quay before some vessel she fancied she recognised should make the harbour! only to be assured, with a pitying smile for her ignorance, when she got there, that it was the *Goëland,* the *Marie-Louise*—never the *Alouette.*

But ah! the heaven when at last the dream came true, and she stood upon the quay feeling those long arms wrapped round her; looking into those dear, inscrutable eyes; listening to the tones her ear had ached for.

"Can heaven itself have a better moment in store than this?" she asked.

## *BOOK VII.*

### THE LAST ROAD.

I am fevered with the sunset,
I am fretful with the bay,
For the wander-thirst is on me
And my soul is in Cathay.

There's a schooner in the offing,
With her topsails shot with fire,
And my heart has gone aboard her
For the islands of desire.

—*Bliss Carman.*

Oh, western wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain?
Christ! that my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again!

—*Anon.* (*16th Cent.*).

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin?
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yes, beds for all who come.

—*Christina Rossetti.*

## I.

WHITE snow and silver water, faint ghosts of ships and trees and spires through the mists, deeps of chrysoprase and shallows of amethyst, and beyond the snow a sunset fire like the dream in the heart of an opal. The tide was out in the wide estuary, but the mud-flats were covered with late-fallen snow. The sky was clear now, for a small, biting wind had arisen from the east and swept the snow-clouds before it.

The crunching of Jasper's footsteps in the snow ceased for an instant, and he stood with lifted head gazing into the jewelled beauty, but for Phenice, who followed with eyes cast down, the sight had neither loveliness nor significance, or only a significance of woe. She no longer carried the fiddle, but the little burden on her arm, though scarcely heavier, weighed on her heart like lead as it wailed feebly and stirred within the muffling shawl. As she came up with her husband she stretched out her hand and laid it on his sleeve.

"Jasper, we can't go any longer, the baby and I. We must have shelter."

His dreamy eyes came back to earth with an effort. "It is not snowing now, but you are tired; here, let me take her."

"No, no, you would let her get cold. Her breath-

ing sounds so odd, I am frightened. I wish I knew where to find a doctor."

"Doctor! Nonsense! Come along. Step out for a few miles and we will find Pamela. She is wiser than fifty doctors. Those brown babies of hers never ail."

He strode on, and she followed dumbly. Presently a long bridge of many arches stretched before them, and beyond it the deep-red stain left by the sunset glowed between the trunks of the forest-trees and seemed to pulse like a furnace; below the trees, the shadows across the deep-rutted road lay blue and violet. Behind them lay the town, before them the desolate country. Phenice stopped again with more resolution.

"Jasper, if you must needs go to the forest, you must go alone. I daren't take the baby. Give me what money you can spare, and I'll get a lodging in the town."

"You are welcome to take all there is," he said, fumbling, "but there isn't much. I made nothing on the crossing; folks don't want to listen to music this weather, and as you know we had spent nearly all the reserve before we left France. We've had so many extra expenses."

She held out her hand. "But you can get more any time. Your aunt——"

"What she has given, she has given. I have never asked her for a penny piece, I resolved I never wound."

"But for little Ellen's sake? Besides, why should you have more pride with your own people than you

have with strangers? If Pamela offers us hospitality, you know you will take it without scruple."

"Well!" He put a few shillings into her hand. "There, take it and do the best you can with it. No doubt I shall get more, by hook or by crook, before long."

She took the money and turned back. She did not even look a farewell, but followed silently the double track of footsteps that lay interlaced upon the snow. A few tears dropped upon the plaid shawl, and she never even put up her hand to wipe them away, but let them freeze, if they would, upon her lashes.

The glow had faded from the water; it was steely grey, and the blue shadows were turning to ink.

Presently the snow crunched behind her, but she did not turn her head. A voice was in her ear.

"Wife, I am coming with you. We will get a lodging till the child's cold is gone. After all, what does a week or two matter?"

His tall figure came between her and the bitter wind; his arm folded round her presently, holding her up; and so stayed, she walked more bravely.

When they had regained the outskirts of the town they paused to look about them. What they sought was not easy to find, but might be less difficult here than in the town itself, where the cheaper inns would be noisy and dirty, and quiet lodgings would not only be dearer, but apt to look askance on travellers who came on foot in such weather without luggage. They had rarely stopped before in an English town; most of their winters had been spent abroad, and in the depths of the country Jasper had friends scattered

up and down, who are always willing to take him in.

Looking on the harbour was a row of small one-story houses, most of which displayed "Apartments" on a card in the window; artizans' dwellings, clean, respectable, but poor. Application at several of these, however, met with a decided negative. They were full—were expecting a party to come in—took no one without references. Jasper was loth to turn down into the network of squalid streets that lay behind, but the baby coughed and wailed, and Phenice kept saying, "Anywhere, never mind how poor; anywhere out of the cold."

At a corner where a little alley turned up was a small coffee and eating-house, a sordid little place enough, but it looked snug with the light of a roaring fire shining out where the red curtains would not quite draw together. Jasper paused irresolute. Here might be food and fire, but what sort of company for Phenice? She pushed forward.

"Let us go in there."

At that moment the swing-door opened and two men and a dog appeared. One man looked at the steely stars, swore a round oath, and, turning up the collar of his coat, hastened off up the alley; the other looked round a minute, then, catching sight of Jasper, hobbled down the steps and clapped him heartily on the shoulder. "Hullo, mate! Who'd ever ha' thought o' seein' you! Dropped from the clouds, have ye?"

And Phenice, looking down at the little dog who was grouting about in the snow, recognised her old friend the Toby-dog, without his big frill.

Nothing ever astonished Jasper; he was too well used to seasonable or unseasonable encounters.

"Why, we were just coming in to ask whether we could get a night's lodging. This weather does not suit the wife and the little one; we never thought of meeting an old acquaintance. Are you stopping there?"

"Ay, stoppin' there for good an' all. Mrs. Spickett—don't ye mind Mrs. Spickett?—she've took me for her third; bein' always used to a man about the house to do her chores and 'elp with the business, so the Punch and Judy show is put away up garret, and Toby do go about like a gentleman at large, without his frill."

"Well, can you take us in?"

"To be sure I can, and welcome. I aint forgot that bob nor a friend in need, if you have. Come in, missus, come in! So there's a little 'un," looking at Phenice's shawled bundle.

As Phenice sat beside the glowing fire in a wide wooden armchair and, unpinning the shawl, let the baby stretch its little cramped limbs to the warmth, she thought how many kind people there were in the world, after all. The Punch and Judy man hastened to throw on more coals and fill the kettle, while his wife, late Mrs. Spickett, a stout, red-faced woman, came and chafed the tiny feet and made some milk warm in a saucepan. Even Toby tried to do his part by putting his paws on her knee and licking the baby's little hand.

Mrs. Timbs, as her present name turned out to be, declared the doctor not to be necessary; a hot bath

and a linseed poultice were what was wanted, and a teaspoonful of a mysterious syrup.

"And who should know if I didn't, me dear?" she said; "me havin' buried eleven out of fifteen."

It was good measure for Jasper's shilling, pressed down and running over.

## II.

THE snow lingered late that year—"waiting for more to fetch it away," as Mrs. Timbs remarked—and little Ellen still had that wheezing on her chest that kept Phenice anxious. She herself had grown wan and pale and manifestly unfit to be travelling about in winter-time. A week or two went by, and still they must wait: the baby had taken fresh cold. A delicate child, Mrs. Timbs pronounced her, that would always need the greatest care; and how could she be properly cared for in the rough, wandering life which had become second nature to her father?

Phenice was sitting beside Mrs. Timbs' old cradle in the February dusk, rocking it with her foot, her fingers busy with fleecy white wool, knitting a tiny spencer. Her thoughts were trying to weave a possible future for Jasper and herself and the child, but the combination baffled her. The padre had foretold that she would make him settle down, but in all these years she had not been able to do it; and the little daughter from whom she had hoped so much had no more power over him than a kitten. She had hardly tried before; till baby came the life had contented her well enough; she must now, though. She bent down and turned back the corner of the blanket. The child was fast asleep, with her thumb in her mouth. She covered her over and went into the next room.

Jasper stood beside the window, his fingers drumming on the pane; in his other hand he held a little old brown book with worn corners; his finger still in the place where he had been reading. He had been circling round like swallows before they take flight; tramping off to the forest for days together to see his gipsy friends, but always coming back. These journeys had not allayed his restlessness; it seemed gaining on him day by day. His wife went to him and slipped her hand into his arm.

"Jasper, I've been thinking. We can't stay on here, you know."

"Of course not; it is not I that want to stay. I'm ready to start to-morrow."

"But don't you see? We can't just go off in the old way. We must have a place to go to. I never minded for myself, but we can't drag baby about in all weathers. She'll die, if we let her catch another cold."

"I don't see," said Jasper. "She'd probably be much stronger if you didn't mew her up so. The gipsy babies get on all right."

"But she isn't a gipsy baby, and she can't stand it."

"Well, why not leave her with Mrs. Timbs?" he said in the tone of one who has hit upon an excellent suggestion. "The good woman seems pleased with her, and of course I would pay for her."

"Leave her! You're not in earnest?"

"Well, why not?"

Phenice looked at him in despair; the utter hopelessness of arguing made her dumb.

His gaze went back again to the long reaches of the harbour, where the tall-masted ships were moving out to sea.

After a little she began again, in a discouraged voice:

"What I was thinking was that perhaps we could get a little house, in the forest perhaps—I don't know, though; there would be nothing to do there, and the aunt's money would hardly be enough. If it was in a town you might get something to do, and so might I." She stopped.

"Do you know," he said, "the other day, poking about these old bookstalls, I chanced on this." He held it up. "It is an account of the travels of a Jesuit missionary in the seventeenth century. He went right through Turkestan to Thibet, a way hardly anyone has travelled since. It reminded me of a journey I began once that was cut short; I keep going back to it in my dreams. I see perpetually that road, winding up and up through the gate of the hills. I shall never rest until I have been there."

"Well, well! What is the use of talking of it now? We will go some day when baby is older. Don't you see we can't possibly take those journeys with a little infant; it is madness."

He said nothing, and she resumed:

"What we have to think of now is what we had best do next. We've always lived from hand to mouth so, but with children you can't do that."

"Well, why shouldn't Mrs. Timbs take care of the little beggar, as I suggested? I am sure she would; she is a kind soul."

"Kind? yes; but it is I that must take care of baby. If only I had a little place of my own. Don't you see that I couldn't possibly leave her?"

"Then——" He stopped. A huge coal barge, warping out, drew his eyes again.

"We could surely get a little cottage, or perhaps two rooms," she went on; "and so beautifully as you play, I don't see why you shouldn't get a regular engagement. Anyway, there would be your aunt's money coming in soon, and I dare say I could get some needlework—oh, Jasper, you're not listening. I do wish you would attend."

He turned from the window and folded his arms. "I knew this would come," he said. "You remember I told you. Seriously, Phenice, do you expect me to live here day in, day out, in one little narrow street, and go regularly to my work, evening by evening?"

"Why not? You have surely had your fill of wandering in all these years."

"My fill of wandering? When I have travelled the whole world through, and the worlds to come, perhaps I shall."

They stood silently, side by side. The twilight faded and the stars came out one by one, and a small light-house, on a spit of sand, shone red like a jewel. Presently Phenice touched his arm again.

"Dear," she said gently, "I have been thinking it all out, and I see what we must do. I will go home to Priestlands for a bit. I'll write to grandfather tomorrow; I am almost sure he would forgive me. He will let me stay there for a while, while you go off by yourself for this long journey. I believe you'll quite

enjoy being independent again for once," she added with a little, unsteady laugh.

"The very thing!" he said. "Phenice, you are a trump. There's a cargo boat, commanded by a man I know, sailing for Batoum early next week. I can work my passage out. I've often done it before; and then, when Aunt Christie's money comes, you can keep it for yourself and the child. You understand about drawing it out; don't you?"

"Yes, perfectly; but you must let me know from time to time where you will be, that I may send you a share of it. You may want it."

"Not I. I shall be all right; I can always make my own way with my fiddle and my two hands."

He was alert and eager as a boy, and with happy, kindling eyes he held to his wife's lips the bitter cup, which she drained to the dregs without wincing—that bitterest cup of all that Love gives his votaries to drink; when the sole thing we can do for our beloved is to let him go.

## III.

It had been in the dawn of a summer morning that Phenice last crossed the wide ridges of down that lay round her home; in the dusk of a winter afternoon she was finding her way home again. How light and free had been her step then, over the scented, springy tangle of thyme and milkwort and rest-harrow. Now it was a weary foot, beneath which crackled the hoar-frost on the withered bents. The little burden wrapped in her shawl was not a very heavy one; yet under it her arms ached, and her heart was sore.

The train had brought her as far as Dronechester and, used as she was to walking, she should have made nothing of the six or seven miles across the hills to Priestlands, but with the white, clinging mists a weariness had come over her spirit. The downs were as white as though snow had fallen, although the sky above the fog was clear, but the damp froze in the air and clothed every leaf and spray with a bordering of fantastic crystal, and the blades of grass, as her foot brushed them, tinkled like fairy bells. The worst was that the mists crowded down so low and close that presently all landmarks were blotted out, and she could only guide herself by trying to remember the smaller features of the sheep-tracks. Here there used to be a hayrick—this must be the one; or she recognised a bit of broken paling or an ancient thorn-tree. It was

puzzling, though; thorn-trees and broken palings are apt to repeat themselves. It would have been wiser after all to keep to the high-road, though it had added nearly another mile to the distance.

A tinkle of sheep-bells made her quicken her pace more hopefully, and she felt her way round the inclosing hurdles; hoping to find the shepherd, and listening eagerly for a bark which should call his attention to the approach of a stranger. What if it should be their own flock and Shepherd Chalke in charge of them, or at least young Zack! No; all was quiet except for the hurried scampering inwards of the sheep as she passed round the fold. No one there, either man or dog; clearly they had all been folded safe for the night and left. If only the silly things would let her get near enough to see their brand she could probably tell her whereabouts from that, since she knew all the neighbours' marks as well as her grandfather's. She kept perfectly still for awhile, and presently one or two bolder spirits plucked up courage to come back to the sheltered corner from which they had distractedly fled. She leaned over, very careful not to startle them again, and made out a blue mark quite strange to her, neither the one that distinguished their own flock nor any that she knew. Either there had been changes since her day, or she was farther from her road than she had guessed. Well, so long as she could keep to the track it must lead somewhere, either to a house or to the main road, and then she could ask her way.

She was right. Presently a blur of light and a looming, shapeless shadow hinted at a house, and as

she drew near resolved itself into a small, square, red cottage with a slate roof and a little plat of garden in front. She could not recognize it; it seemed new. She hesitated a moment by the gate. From the window light streamed out, tinging the frosty cabbages with rose, and a woman's shadow crossed and recrossed it quickly. Clearly she was setting the tea, for the wayfarer could hear the clink of the spoons as she dropped them in the saucers—one, two, three, four, five. She wished a sixth might be put for her: tea and rest and home seemed a long way off.

She went up through the garden and rapped gently on the door. A woman's voice cried, "Come in!" and she lifted the latch and entered. The mistress of the house was filling a brown teapot from a heavy black kettle, and finished her task before she turned round. Phenice paused a moment.

"I have missed my way," she said when the woman raised herself and turned, showing a youthful, pleasant countenance. "I don't know how I came to be so stupid. I thought I knew every inch of these downs, but this fog——"

"Fog indeed! I am quite frightened about my little ones finding their way home from school. Come in, do, and warm yourself a bit. Why, you're as white as a Christmas cake! It don't snow, do it?"

"No, it doesn't snow, but the fog seems to freeze on one. I am nervous about my baby, she is such a delicate little thing. We ought to have been home half an hour ago. Can you put me in the way to Priestlands?"

"Priestlands? Don't know it. Perhaps my hus-

band may, if you can bide till he comes in; he won't be long now. We've only lately come into these parts, and I've too much to do to get about much."

"It lies in Hampage parish. Perhaps you may know the church?"

"Hampage? Law! you've come long ways out of your road. Well, this house aint many yards from the lane; you follow that half a mile or so, past the school, and you'll come to Twickley, and—well, there you'd better ask again."

"Dear me!" said Phenice, "I did make a mistake, to be sure. I know where I am now, but it's a long road."

"So 'tis, and carrying a child's weary work. If it had been of a Tuesday—why, 'tis Friday, so it is! There'll be the carrier along presently, and he'll give ye a lift. He won't come for another half-hour. Set down to the table and have a cup of tea, do." And the sixth spoon dropped into the saucer with a hospitable clink.

Warmed and fed as well as comforted with kind words, it was with renewed courage that she set forth again, and stood at the corner of the lane watching for the hooded cart, with the warm light of the little house behind her. She stepped out into the road, and called loudly, as soon as the rumbling sound drew near, but the carrier had almost passed her, and it was only by getting in front of the horse that she could attract his attention. Then he pulled up suddenly.

"Why ever didn' ye call out?" he grumbled at her as she clambered in.

"I did," she said, "as loud as ever I could."

"Eh? Ye might ha' skeered old Dobbin, a-jumpin' at his head that way."

Inside the tilt the cart was full of boxes and bundles of all shapes and sizes, but she found she was the only passenger.

"I want to get down at Stanham Cross, please," she said.

"Then 'twarn't no use your gettin' in, 'cos I don't go there."

"Why, I thought you went through Twickley, and past the Old Beacon to Stanbury?"

"In coorse I do. But what's the use o' your gooin' there, ef ye want's Hallam House?"

"I didn't say Hallam House; I said Stanham Cross. Just below the Old Beacon, don't you know?"

"Well, I know my way, and you've no call to bawl at a man."

Clearly, to make any inquiries of her deaf charioteer was perfectly useless, so Phenice held her peace and they jogged on for a couple of miles or so in total silence. Little Ellen slept peacefully, unheeding the jolts which shook her mother's weary bones. Soon she could recognise the outline of the great ridge that reared itself in front of her with its crest of stooping pines, looking gigantic through the gathering gloom.

"Here ye be, missus," said the carrier, seeming well pleased to be rid of his passenger.

She took out her purse and paid him the few pence he charged, and climbed down with some difficulty, not liking to ask such a cross man to hold the baby for her. Yet, churlish as he was, she would fain have had his or any company on the rest of her road; it felt

very lonesome when, with a gruff "Evenin'," he whipped up old Dobbin and rumbled away into the night.

For it was almost night now; she could still see the white road and the shadowy banks on either hand; hedges there were none, and the distance was so short she could hardly go astray, as she went down the side of the hill till she reached the sheltered hollow where the stunted elms bordered the short approach.

Grandfather had always been very particular to have that gate kept shut after dark, but she noticed that it not only stood wide open, but was fixed hard in the frosty ground, as she tried from long habit to draw it to after her; it had dropped from the upper hinge, too, and hung awry. "Grandfather is getting old," she said to herself, "but Dan should have seen to it."

It was but a few yards to the front garden and the little wicket. It was odd she could see no light; they never used to shut the shutters in the kitchen till bedtime; the men so often had to go out late, and liked to be able to see the light as they turned down the avenue.

Baby woke and cried; a little fretful wail, she never cried loud. Phenice hushed her impatiently. The sound made her feel worse, more apprehensive, less hopeful of her reception: yet surely, surely, they could never turn her from the door.

On the path she stumbled over something and nearly fell; there seemed to be all sorts of strange things lying about. There was a broken coal-scuttle on the flower-bed, which seemed to be a mass of weeds, and it was

an old packing case that she had struck her foot against in the path. That her trim garden should have been suffered to lapse into a rubbish-heap made her feel more hopelessly unforgiven. The door was fastened, but on so cold a night that was but natural. Her knock struck hollow and echoed through the house. Was that a footstep coming in answer? It sounded more like the scamper of a scared mouse. She knocked again and yet again, wilder and more desperately each time. Were they all out? Would they never come?

She stepped over the box edging that had grown tall and rank, and went to the kitchen window, her feet crunching on the frosty border. She rested one hand on the sill and raised herself to peer in, with some difficulty because of the baby. The shutters were on the outside, and were open; no blinds, no curtains, only the blackness of a great emptiness. Desperate, she ran round the house to the window of her own old parlour. That, too, gazed out into the night with blank eyes. The fog had cleared away as the moon had risen, and some pallid beams lay across the floor, just enough to show the bare, carpetless boards.

Gone! It was incredible. Sooner the Old Beacon might have disappeared than that grandfather's home should know him no more.

There was no shelter for her and baby here; no door to be opened, no heart to be softened by any appeal. There was nothing for it but to make her way down to the village with her wailing infant.

As she went weeping down the lane she saw a moving whiteness ahead of her as it might be the white-

ness of a smockfrock, and heard a quavering voice uplifted in a stave:

> "The second good joy that Mary had
> It was the joy of two——"

She quickened her pace to a run.

"Leander! Leander!"

> "To see her yonge sonne, Jesus Christ,
> Making the lame to goo.
> Making the lame to goo, good Lord——'

The song broke off abruptly. "Lord ha' mussy!" And the singer staggered against the hedge.

"Leander, it is me, missy. I am not a ghost."

Leander Spreadbury stood with his spade over his shoulder and his mouth wide open.

"Missy! Why, so 'tis. Well, I never did!"

"Leander, what has happened? Where are they? Where's——" Her voice broke.

The old man pointed solemnly with his thumb over his shoulder toward the village, where the church spire cut the sky.

"Over there, missy, your grandad he do lay, waiting the Last Judgment, and Mr. Andrew"—with a sweep of the spade seawards—"he be gone to the wars."

"How long?" she gasped. "And I never knew!"

"How long? Well, a matter o' five months as I should judge. 'Twere just after last harvest; and a mighty poor harvest he wur."

"And everything sold up?"

"Pretty nigh everythink. I minds a few bits o' things was giv' t'old Shepherd Chalke to take keer on for ye, case you was ever to come this way agen."

"Is Shepherd Chalke in his old cottage?"

"Oh, ay; he've a come on the parish, but they lets un bide, and young Zack he do help un a bit; but law! he aint no good, young Zack aint. He never hed no head for the sheep. Hedgin' and ditchin' is what he mostly do."

They were trudging along side by side now. The old cowman cast a glance at her bundle curiously.

"So there's a little un," he said. "And where's the goodman?"

"Gone abroad for a little while," said Phenice curtly. "I could not go with him this time, the child is too young. I must turn up here, for I think I'll go straight to shepherd's; perhaps he'll be able to let me have a room for to-night, since there's no home for me."

In the same old cottage, with the bare tangle of stems over the door showing where the honeysuckle porch had been, Phenice found her old friend, grown frail and weak; sitting by the fireside with a blanket wrapped round his legs to keep them from the draught that blew in under the door.

He, too, when he lifted his eyes from his book and saw Phenice, white with hoar-frost, standing in the doorway, thought he had a visitor from another world. He took his horn-rimmed spectacles from his nose and rubbed his eyes, unbelieving.

"May I come in?" said the well-loved, well-re-

membered tone. "Oh, Zack! I've come home to find there is no home any more, and I didn't know."

The old man rested his hands on the arms of his chair, and tried to raise himself.

"Is it real," he said, "or am I dreaming? Is it Mrs. Jasper? Dream or ghost or whoever ye be, come to the fire, and pull to the door. Excuse me, ma'am, that I can't rest on my feet."

She came in and knelt on the hearthrug, laying one hand on his knee.

"It is really and truly me, Zack. I came thinking granddad would let me stay with him a bit, never thinking—I did write and there was no answer, and I thought perhaps they were still angry, and Dan wouldn't let him write, but when he saw me he would relent, and now——"

The old shepherd looked down at the bundle.

"Give me the little lamb to hold," he said.

She laid the child on his knee, and drew a chair to the hearth. As she did so her eyes fell on the table against the wall where lay her inlaid workbox, her eggshell china cups, her spotted shells. The sight kept her dumb and choking.

The old man unwound the shawl in which the baby was muffled, pulled off her worsted socks and held her little feet to the fire; handling her as tenderly as he used to handle the new-born lambs.

"And where's Mr. Jasper?" he asked presently, when her face had quieted.

"He has gone abroad. It was my own plan," she added eagerly. "I wished him to go; he had grown restless. Baby was ailing and we had to stop in some

horrid little lodgings, and I thought it would be best if he went away for a bit, and grandfather would take us in; just for the winter, you know."

Old Zack shook his head. "He shouldn't ha' gone," he said, "till he'd ha' seen you safe."

"He didn't mean to, but I wrote and the answer never came, and then baby took fresh cold and I was bound to wait, and there was the chance for him to get a passage out to Batoum, which else he would miss, and I said Go. Don't blame him, Zack, please."

Zack dandled the baby and croodled to it a minute without answering. He thought of his words on the hillside years ago, but he was not the man to say, I told you so. He turned his blue eyes to her presently.

"Well, and what now, missy?"

"I wish I could stay here," she said. "Haven't you a room I could hire? I shall have some money coming to me every quarter, and I could take such care of you. I would wash and mend for you and cook your meals."

He shook his head, though his eyes danced at the picture.

"'Twon't do, missy; 'tisn't fit for the likes o' you. You don't know what them two little bedrooms in the roof is like. Why, there aint a fireplace in nayther one on 'em, and the thatch is off one place and the wet do come through. We'll do the best we can for you to-night, but ye couldn't bide."

"If it wasn't for baby, I shouldn't mind. She is so delicate, and I remember how cold it always is over these hills." She was silent, musing.

"And have ye never a friend in the world, missy, 'cept the old shepherd, as ye could turn to?"

"I don't know how it is; we found friends wherever we went, but I can't tell where to find them now. They came and went like faces in the fire."

She passed them all in review. The Punch and Judy man and his good-natured wife had done their best for her, but she could not live there. Where were Anastasie and Lulu now? Or Mr. Perrownick and the Freeling Family? Where was Pamela, and what could she do for her if she found her? Little Ellen could not live in a gipsy tent. Her thoughts travelled back to the white-walled convent rising out of the sea, but a long journey in the winter weather and a sea transit lay between her and Mère Thérèse. The padre had been kind to her long ago, and he was a friend of Jasper's, but then she had become a Catholic now; so most likely a priest of the Anglican Church would not receive or advise her. As to Aunt Castleworthy, she certainly would not go to her with Jasper's child to be told he had deserted her, and they always said he would.

"Missy, I don't mean for to be curious, but is it your husband's friends that pay you that money you was speaking of?"

"You are right, Zack." She answered the thought rather than the words. "It is to her we must go. It is an aunt of his that sends it. She is a queer old lady and sharp, and I am horribly afraid of her, but he said, 'If you are in a difficulty, go to Aunt Christie,' so that is what we must do. And he will know where to find us when he comes back."

"My dear," said the old man, "you'll excuse me makin' so free—ma'am, I should have said—God knows how I'd liked to ha' kep' ye and shared my poor house wi' ye, but 'twan't fittin' so to be, and to-morrow you'll take your ways on and find a home, please God."

## IV.

FEW places wear a more cheery aspect, when a short winter day is closing in, than a blacksmith's forge. Standing by the roadside, generally where two ways meet, its wide-open door lets out the ruddy glow of its furnace heart. Phenice stayed her steps by the threshold a minute, looking in at the flight of sparks; at the roaring flame that rushed up and wavered at the breathing of the great bellows; at the dark, stooping figure that plied them; at the other swaying form with muscles tense, arms and breast bare and glowing like bronze, as he swung easy from the hips, delivering well-planted blows at the molten iron on the anvil. In the shadow stood a white horse, patient and quiet as though well used to the glare and noise, while a third man sat on a log and held the bridle.

The smith paused, brought the hammer to the ground with a swing, and straightened himself. Then he saw the woman standing outside in the snow and called to her:

"Come inside, missus, into the lew, and warm ye a bit."

The man who held the pony got up and dragged a cutting block forward to the fire for her to sit on, and she stepped into the circle of light and warmth. She was glad, not only of the warmth, but of the company, for the road across the moor was lonesome. One

other house beyond the forge stood solitary by the wayside, but that was one she hated to pass alone, for a remembrance came back to her of passing it with Jasper and of a tale he had told. It was all very well to listen to a grisly story in the sunshine, holding Jasper's arm, but to pass by it alone in gathering gloom, and with courage beaten down, was another matter. Its innocent-sounding name was the Three Pigeons, but for a century past it had gone in the countryside by the name of the inn of the Three Murderers. Phenice had forgotten the details of the story, but the horror of it remained. She wished she had taken the train to Lymedale, but her unexpected difficulties and delays had exhausted her slender purse, so she must needs get out at Brackenshaw and walk the five miles down to the marshes.

"It is nice and warm in here," she said, stretching her hands to the fire, "but I mustn't stop. I've a long way to go yet, and it is getting dark."

"And where might ye be going?" asked the blacksmith.

"I want to get to Miss Christie Waring's, at the Five Thorns, beyond Lymedale."

"Well, there now," said the man in a drab smock, who held the pony, "if that aint luck! I'm goin' that way me own self wi' a load o' charcoal, and you and the little un could ride as peart as possible in front of it. Old Snowdrop is as quiet as a lamb."

Phenice smiled at him. "You must be a good sort," she said, "if what you call luck is just a chance to help a wayfarer."

"Ah!" said the blacksmith, wiping the sweat off his

forehead, "aint that the dear Lord's best favours? Which on us wouldn't be proud to help Him on's road, and didn't He say 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me'?"

"Ay, sure!" said the bellows-blower in the background. "'Tis all the same; though 'tisn't a cup of cold water as you're wanting, but a warm by a good fire and a lift on your way."

"Well, rest ye there a bit while I shoe the pony. The iron's cool enough by now. Soho, girl! Come up! Give us your hoof."

Phenice unpinned the shawl and sat the baby upright on her knee. The little thing crowed delighted, and stretched tiny hands to the sparks that went whirling up.

The bellows were no longer needed, and the man who had been blowing came out of his corner. He chirrupped and nodded to the baby, and gave her a little bit of cool iron to play with. Then he looked concernedly at Phenice's white cheeks.

"We haven't a bit nor a sup to offer ye here, worse luck," he said. "But, after all, man does not live by bread alone. As Peter said: 'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee.' I will give you the Living Word."

He reached down an old brown leather Bible, much thumbed, from the shelf where it lay amongst tools and bottles, and wetting his thumb to make the leaves go over more easily, he turned up the parable of the Good Samaritan, and read it in a sonorous and reverent voice.

She listened devoutly and well-pleased, but was thankful that her kind entertainers did not press her for her own experiences. She felt sure it would have hurt their prejudices to learn that she was a Catholic, and yet how their kindness recalled to her mind the old abbé at Chartres. Was it not indeed one Spirit?

Horse-shoe and reading were ended together; the blacksmith found an old sack to spread on Snowdrop's back between the bags of charcoal, and lifted her on in his strong arms; the baby was tucked away once more in the folds of the warm shawl and, amid thanks on her side and blessings from her new friends, the little cavalcade set forth; the pony stepping willingly with her fresh burden over the light fallen snow.

The charcoal-burner was silent, after the manner of his kind; he walked at the pony's head, mindful of possible slips, and left his companion to her own meditations, save that occasionally, either to keep up her spirits or his own, he sang in a rather discordant voice a stave or two of some old-fashioned hymn. "The hosts of God encamp around the dwellings of the just," appeared to be a favourite, for he gave her that several times over on the course of the journey. She was too well used to riding on all sorts of animals, with or without saddles, to have any fears or difficulties as to keeping her seat, and the pony paced sedately enough. At last the charcoal-burner pointed ahead with his whip.

"See that light? That's Five Thorns."

Dimly she could make out the little low house and

the thorn trees, and a square of bright light where a lamp stood in a window.

"Ay," he went on, "she burn that light summer and winter all night, the old lady do. Folks say as she've a nephew, a wild one, in foreign parts, and she have a fancy he may come back any time. 'Tis a lonesome road; the light have helped me on my way many a time."

"Shall I get down here, then?" said Phenice. "I needn't burden you any longer; I can see my road from here."

"You bide where you be; I'm going to see you safe to the door."

He left the pony at the gate and, crunching up the snowy footpath, knocked on the door with the handle of his whip. In a moment it was opened by the same prim maid-servant Phenice remembered.

"We're not wanting any charcoal at present," said she; "and why ever didn't you come to the back door?"

"Because I've brought you a better load than charcoal, and one that the King's Highway wouldn't be too good for. I've brought ye a woman and a child."

"Law sakes, man! Whatever do you mean? Are you gone crazy?"

"Come to the gate and see. I won't lift her down unless so-be as you're going to take her in."

Prudence picked up her petticoats daintily in one hand, and came stepping down over the thin snow.

"Prudence, do you remember me?" said Phenice's soft voice. "Do you think Miss Christie will see me? I have brought a message from Mr. Jasper."

"Mercy on us! Mr. Jasper's wife, I do declare! And a baby! Whatever will the mistress say to that? Come in, ma'am, come in."

And she took the child, while the charcoal-burner lifted Phenice down from her improvised saddle.

Still carrying the baby, she preceded Phenice down a passage, and opened the drawing-room door. There sat Miss Christie beside the fire, reading in a large, heavy volume on a desk before her. She never raised her head till the servant said, "See here, ma'am; Mr. Jasper has sent you a present. What do you think of this?"

At this inopportune moment little Ellen woke, roused by the light, and finding herself in strange arms, set up a cry. Her mother hastened to snatch her back and smother the wail in her own bosom.

"Aunt Christie," she said, looking straight at the astonished old lady, "I hope you will not be angry with us for coming, but we did not know what to do, and Jasper said, if I was in a difficulty I was to come to you."

If Phenice had written her appeal, the probability is that Miss Christie would have sent money with the information that she did not care about women and children, but the calm directness of her niece-in-law's address suited her. She fixed her keen, blue eyes on mother and child for an instant of silent amazement, then she said coolly:

"Jasper always knew how to get what he wanted, and so do you apparently. Where is he? And have you come for a day or a week or what?"

"I don't know. I mean I don't know how long I want to stop, nor what I am going to do, till I can look round a little. Jasper is gone to Thibet."

With the last words her voice shook a little, though she tried to steady it.

"And left you alone with the child? That was like him."

"Ah, don't! He——"

"There, there, I should be the last to blame him. Don't I know better than anybody the demon that drove him?"

"He was wild to go," went on Phenice, "but he waited and waited. I was to go to my grandfather, but we got no answer to my letter, and we never knew that grandfather was dead; and then the child took cold and I had to wait another week, and he would have missed his chance. So I said, 'Go; we shall be all right.' And when I went I found my home all broken up, and there was nobody at all."

The pathetic cadence of Phenice's voice moved the old woman, but whatever moved her always stirred her to greater sharpness.

"Well, I suppose you knew what you risked when you took that crooked stick, my nephew, to your husband?"

"Yes, I knew, and I chose to have it so. I can manage to take care of his child till he comes again, if I have time to look around, but for the moment there is nothing. And he said, 'If anything happens, go to Aunt Christie; she will take care of you.' So we came."

"You did right. Prudence, make the red room

ready for them and light a good fire. Give them some supper and put them both to bed."

"And in the meantime," said Prudence, who had been standing in an attitude of attention at the door, "they had better come into the kitchen with me. Mrs. Jasper won't mind, I am sure, and you aint used to a child crying. It would get upon your nerves."

"Very good. We will talk of your plans in the morning, Phenice."

Next morning Phenice was summoned to the bedroom, where Jasper's aunt was sitting very erect in bed, eating an egg.

"I have settled it," the old lady said after the briefest salutation. "You are to remain here until your husband comes back for you. You will spend twice as much, if you live by yourself, and as to your earning anything, why, a woman with an infant simply hasn't a chance.

"No, don't worry me with that kind of thing," as Phenice was about to protest her desire of independence. "I suppose you will admit that it is the duty of your husband's family to provide for his child, if he doesn't. He wished you to have what I have been allowing him, and the pair of you won't cost me more than that."

"There's one thing," said Phenice, still standing meekly before her, "that I think I ought to tell you before you decide to keep us. We are Roman Catholics, the baby and I."

"Bless the girl! What does that matter to me? You can be Mohammedans, if you like."

"Then, for Ellen's sake,—and for his,—I accept and thank you," Phenice said briefly.

"That's settled then, and we need say no more. If you had been like most women, counting your words nineteen to the dozen, I don't think I could have stood it. As it is, you must keep the baby out of my way. I'm not a baby-worshipper."

## V.

THE frost gave and the ways were foul with mire and slush. Phenice sat indoors and looked at the world through a veil of silver rain. She could not take the baby out in the damp, and she could not leave her; she was not used to being shut up, and it was no wonder that she felt more tired and weary, when evening came, than ever she had after her day-long tramps through rain and mud. She never complained, but she was aware of the unspoken sympathy of the restless-eyed old woman who sat chained to her chair day in, day out, on the other side of the fire.

Then came the wind and swept the heavens clear and drank up the moisture from the soaked earth. March roared itself out into calmness, and in the smiling April days she used to carry the little one out into the fields and set her down to crawl and toddle among the daisies. Sometimes the goose-girl would come and pasture her ungainly white flock beside them and play with the baby, but she was half-witted and not much company for Phenice. She always took care to have her hands filled with needlework; there was plenty to do, making and mending little white garments, but, busy as she was, the quick flashing needle between her fingers never eased nor held the travelling thoughts which moved ever eastward with the slow-sailing barges, or took wider flight with the unhurried march of the wind-driven clouds.

There was no news to make a road for her thoughts to travel by; she hardly looked for any; she knew of old how completely post and telegraph seemed to lapse for her tramp, when the wander-fit was on him. Most likely by this time he had got to regions where such links with civilisation had altogether ceased. She possessed her soul in patience.

Spring broadened into summer, and all the marsh was murmurous with the hum of bees. Warm days came, but, for all her patience, Phenice's heart grew "more desolate, more dreary cold than a forsaken bird's nest filled with snow."

Between her and Miss Christie an undemonstrative friendship by degrees established itself. In the long evenings, when the baby had been tucked safely away in her cradle, she found that, though words and looks might be sharp, her company was not unwelcome to the prisoner in the wheel-chair, and a curt question or two was meant to draw out a description of envied wanderings. At first she avoided enlarging on her own travels, lest it should seem unfeeling to one whose keen longings had been so cruelly thwarted, but, after a little, she learned that nothing so beguiled the monotony of the narrow life as travellers' tales. Of Jasper, too, the aunt could never hear enough. If she were in the mood, Miss Christie loved to tell of the adventures and hair-breadth escapes of her own youth.

Sometimes they read aloud: Miss Christie was usually the reader; she liked it best so. Together they studied every explored nook in Thibet till they could have found their way right across that mysterious country, but there was no telling whether Jasper

might be there; he might have reached regions beyond the hills, where the foot of man had never trod. In these travels of learned explorers Phenice could never see her wanderer.

The faithful Prudence viewed this growing friendship with some disfavour. She liked Phenice, yet could not quite repress a jealous resentment that anyone could be more to her beloved mistress than she could, but against the blandishments of little Ellen she tried to steel her old-maid's heart in vain.

The solitude at Five Thorns was not always unbroken; not seldom the padre would ride over, to see his cousin. She had not many visitors: like a sick cat she had snapped at her friends and relations in her soured disappointment till they believed she really preferred they should keep away, and then she girded at them for not coming. But the padre's large-mindedness understood; he never minded what she said to him; he only laughed when she snubbed and scoffed at him and always came again. He and Phenice always got on well.

"You're a fine, consistent parson!" said Miss Christie to him one day, when Phenice had taken the baby for a walk. "You call yourself a Protestant, I suppose?"

"Certainly not."

"Now what do you say that for? You put me out."

He laughed. "Perhaps that is what I meant to do."

"Now I shall have to begin all over again. Is it true that you wrote to Father Andrewes in Lymedale about Phenice?"

"Of course I did. She was too shy to go to him herself, and she needed his ministrations; she belongs to his flock."

"Well, you are a bold man! I always knew you were more liberal than most, but I hardly thought you would have backed her up in her change of religion."

"Change of religion! Fiddlesticks! Change of opinions—if she had any—change of allegiance. Do you suppose Father Andrewes and I expect to go to separate heavens when we die?"

"Oh, well, you know I'm anything but narrow myself. In fact I am very glad, for otherwise she might have wanted me to ask the curate to tea—which Heaven forbid! But I thought you would have been bound to take a different view."

"Well, Cousin Christie, you are certainly not among those who think the world consists of Englishmen, who are Christians, and foreigners, who are benighted Papists, and I think you might give me credit for having seen over the fence, if I am an English parson. Roaming the world as Phenice did, it was pretty well a choice for her between Catholicism and Paganism. I only wish Jasper may choose as she has chosen. Now report me to the Bishop—or to Mr. Kensit—if you like. Ah, here she comes! That morsel of a baby begins to grow."

One day, coming in from a walk, and entering as she often did by the French window, Phenice found herself suddenly in the presence of visitors. A large, rather handsome, middle-aged woman, extremely well dressed, sat on the sofa; a younger one was near Miss Christie's chair. She had seen a carriage and pair

in the lane, with a spotted dog in attendance, but it had been drawn up in the shade at a little distance, and visitors were so scarce at Five Thorns it had never occurred to her that it could be waiting for anyone there. She paused on the threshold and Miss Christie looked round, but offered no introductions.

"You had better take the baby upstairs," she said with her most forbidding look, and Phenice fled and remained in her own room till she heard the rumble of departing wheels.

"Do you know who my visitors were?" asked Aunt Christie when Phenice came down to tea. "Mrs. Waring and Mrs. Tom Waring. I thought it would be no good to introduce you. It would only lead to complications, and Jasper probably would not have wished it. They don't trouble me much; just a formal call, once a year or so, to avoid an absolute breach. There's not much love lost between me and my brother's widow."

Phenice turned very pale. "Is it Jasper's mother?" she asked, almost under her breath.

"Jasper's mother! Good Heavens, no! Do you mean to say that he has never spoken of his mother to you, his wife?"

She shook her head.

"Well, I always knew he was reserved. I suppose her name has never passed his lips since the day he came home from school and found her gone; but to you! Well, there's no reason you should not know; he would most likely have told you himself, if he could have brought his lips to speak of it. Come and sit down there, and I will tell you the story."

"If you are sure, sure, he would not mind my knowing."

"Mind? He would be thankful. Don't you know he was possessed with a dumb spirit sometimes? You certainly do understand him in a way I thought no woman ever could, yet, when you know, you will be able to make still more allowance for him."

Then for a minute she sat musing.

"I think," she said at last, "I must begin as the biographers do, a great way back; otherwise it is only half the story. My grandfather, who had a passion for music, made the grand tour in his youth, as all young men of position did in his day. His father was the founder of Waring's bank at Lymedale, now the Southern Counties United, and probably he thought that foreign travel and foreign languages would enable his son to develop the business, and compete maybe with Barings and Rothschilds. His ambitious dreams did not come to much; after his son's day the business passed into the hands of a Company; Tom Waring is only one of the directors. Well, I am rambling from the point. Instead of the experience in Continental methods of business that he looked for his son brought him a foreign daughter-in-law, a Hungarian gipsy, beautiful, ignorant, wild as a hawk; her one accomplishment fiddling, in those days considered quite impossible for a woman. Naturally enough she could not lead the peaceful, ordered life of an English country town. Like a caged bird she pined and died when her son, my father, was born. To him, of course, she was only a tradition; she remained a tradition in the family, yet a power, for her gipsy blood

ran in our veins. My brother seemed to have two natures in one; he was his grandfather's idol and was brought up to the business. The roving strain in him seemed shackled by a strong taste for money-making, and for a while he kept it under; when he was twenty-three, however, nature was too strong for him. He went off and wedded a gipsy girl out of the forest. The old story over again."

"Did she die?"

"Worse; she ran away. Can you wonder? Fancy bringing a wild thing like that into that house in the High Street with the wire blinds, and expecting her to behave and dress like other folks. The wonder is she bore it so long. I was abroad at the time, exploring in West Africa, so I cannot give you any particulars; my own belief is she simply went to her own people, unable to endure the monotony of her life any longer. She always seemed to have that innocent boldness, that farouche chastity, that characterise her race. I never believed ill of her, but my brother thought differently; there were suspicious circumstances. Anyhow he got a divorce, and within a scandalously short time made a prudent marriage with the present Mrs. Waring, whom you saw to-day. Poor Leah had only one child, Jasper; he had been kept at school while the whole business was pending. When he came home at last to find another in her place, he simply went straight away and took to the road. It was not the first time; he used to run away from school every term almost. Of course he was caught and brought back and sent where supervision would be stricter, but it was no use; bars and bolts wouldn't

hold him. At last his father's patience gave out; he washed his hands of him and let him go his own way. He had other sons by that time. When I came back from abroad I found Jasper out and arranged to give him a small allowance; he would take it from me, for he knew I had loved his mother."

"What became of her? Did he go to her?"

"He tried to, poor boy, but it was useless; he could never find her. After the trial she disappeared completely. Whether she went abroad or died none of us could never learn. Well, there you have his story."

"Thank you for telling me."

Phenice got up and went quietly away. Her heart cried after him; stretching longing hands of compassion across the world, across the sea. Would he never come back to her, that she might comfort him?

The poppies blazed and faded, the corn fell before the sickle, and all the stubble fields turned grey and wan. Phenice's eyes grew wide with watching.

## VI.

To and fro, up and down, like a caged panther; five paces this way, five paces that, for a man who had rarely walked less than thirty miles a day, and who could never tolerate the sameness of life in one spot. Ah, God! for that little spot now, how narrow so-ever it might be, that corner of earth which held Phenice.

Somewhere she was waiting, watching for him with patient, unreproachful eyes. And he could not get to her, could not even get word to her of where and how to find him. He did not even know how long he had been in prison; many months, to judge by the changing seasons, but he had now quite lost count.

That this should have happened seemed the very irony of fate. After wandering so wide, coming safe through so many perils, that here, on the way home, ten days at most from England—that he should have fallen into this trap! An unmeaning brawl in a street of Constantinople that he had been heedlessly drawn into, and his hitherto unfailing luck had deserted him; he had been thrown into prison and apparently forgotten. Vainly he appealed to the authorities, claimed his right to be brought before the English consul. Everything was promised, nothing done; his case was set aside as of no moment.

He knew well no one would miss him; no one would make search for him. Phenice would think that he was staying away of his own free will, because the chain that bound him to wife and home had begun to gall him. Unless his soul escaped from his body, truly he did not see how he was to escape out of the hands of his captors.

He sat down on the floor; here he had not even the luxury of a stool; and, dropping his forehead into his hands, cogitated deeply. He had never been beaten yet: had his hour of failure struck? He thought till thought passed into trance, and he remained motionless, rigid.

Suddenly he saw a light; a way of escape seemed open before him. A cold sweat broke out upon his forehead; he rose to his feet as though one had lifted him, crying loudly: "Phenie, wife, I am coming!"

. . . . .

"I don't half like leaving you to-night, ma'am; I hardly know why. I wish you would let me sit up with you," said Prudence, stooping to tuck the baby carefully into her cot, and spread an eider-down quilt over her.

Phenice, with flushed cheeks and eyes unnaturally bright, raised herself in bed upon her elbow.

"Why do you say that, Prudence? Do you think her worse?"

"No, ma'am, much better; she is sleeping beautiful, and her skin as moist as can be. It is you I am thinking about."

"Oh, I am nearly well, you dear old fidget. If I

weren't so weak, I would get up to-morrow. You go to bed now, and don't worry about us."

"Well, I've put the night-light and the milk and the lamp to warm it all ready to your hand, and the cot so as you can reach it. And see, here's the little hand-bell. I should hear that in my room, in case you was to ring. I do hope you'll have a good night, ma'am, I'm sure."

Left alone Phenice tried to still herself, though the fever was rising higher and higher. She stretched out a hand from under the bedclothes and took hold of the edge of the cot which had been put within her reach, as though to steady herself by taking fast hold of some material thing. In the regions of mind she seemed to have nothing to hold to. To and fro her soul beat its wings against the old refrain: "Oh, if I knew; if I only knew!" Was Jasper dead? or had he forgotten her? It terrified her to confess within her inmost soul that she would rather know him dead than that he lived and would not come to her. Aunt Christie and Prudence both thought that he would never come now; they had begun to pity her. They used to tell her to comfort herself with the child, but she was horrified to feel a numb indifference to little Ellen stealing over her.

She did not think she slept, but presently she started straight up in bed and listened, pushing her roughened hair back from her ears. Then she slipped to the floor and stood erect, though they told her this morning she was too weak to stand. "I am coming," she said.

Methodically, but with wide, glazed eyes, she put on

her clothes and her shoes, lifted the baby from the cot, and wrapped a warm shawl about her.

"Father's coming," she murmured dreamily; "we must go and meet him."

Then noiselessly, with all the cunning of a sleep-walker, she glided down the stairs and slipped the bolt of the side door into the garden.

The strength of fever had not carried her far. The frenzied search of the morning found her lying in the snow against the slope of the causeway across the marsh, in a stupor that looked like sleep, still holding fast the baby.

"This is fatal," said the doctor as he looked at her. "I was anxious yesterday; she seemed to have so little will to live. I doubt if she will ever regain consciousness."

. . . . .

"Oh, ma'am! a dreadful thing has happened," said Prudence, standing beside her mistress' bed with pale lips and terrified eyes, but speaking in an undertone, as we speak when death is in the house. All sounds were hushed and the windows were darkened, for in an upper room lay Phenice, stark and still, with her baby on her arm, her journeys all ended.

"What is it? Speak! Don't terrify me looking like that."

"Someone has been into the house and upstairs, right up to the room. He must have opened the drawing-room window from the outside. As I came down this morning I was met by a blast of cold air. I went into the room, and there stood the window wide open and the hinges of one lifted. I saw snowy footprints

all across the room and up the stairs, and I followed. That door was open and the sheet turned back. What an awful thing, to be sure! Whoever it was must have been so frightened that he went straight away, for there's not a thing missing."

"Take me to the room."

Hastily huddling on a dressing-gown and some wraps, Prudence lifted her helpless charge into her wheel-chair, and took her to the bedside where the Dead were laid out.

There was no trace of disorder. The sheet had been smoothly folded back, and one hand had been moved; instead of lying on her breast as it had been placed, it lay straight beside her, as though dropped from some other hand that had held it. From her neck the little silver crucifix she used to wear was gone, and in its place rested three snowdrops.

"Oh, ma'am, do you see! The little silver cross! To think anyone could be so wicked as to rob the dead!"

"Prudence, did you put those snowdrops there?"

"No, ma'am; they were not there yesterday. I never noticed them."

"Look out, and tell me if you see footprints in the snow."

"Yes, there's a track coming all along the road, and under the window where the lamp always stands, and there's another going right away across the marsh, as far as I can see. Ah!"

"What? Carry me to the window quick."

Yes, there stretched the footprints across the wide, white waste, far as eye could trace them; and beyond,

where they were lost to sight, moved a tall, gaunt figure against the gray sky, with face set seaward.

Miss Christie sank back against the shoulder of her faithful maid.

"He who took the crucifix had the best right to it. It is Jasper, and I shall never see him again."

**THE END.**

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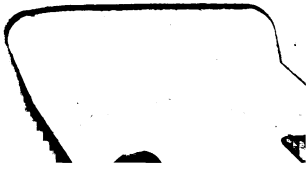
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